



# Patrul Rinpoche on Self-Cultivation: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Tibetan Buddhist Life-Advice

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Patrul Rinpoche on Self-Cultivation: The Rhetoric of  
Nineteenth-Century Tibetan Buddhist Spiritual Advice

**Abstract**

Buddhist forms of “ethical advice”—instructions that address life’s problems and offer methods for alleviating them—are widespread in Buddhist literary history. This dissertation studies four such works, all written by the nineteenth-century Tibetan teacher Dza Patrul Rinpoche (Rdza dpal sprul O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, 1808-1877). I provide a rhetorical analysis of these compositions and endeavor to show how each aspires to reach outside of itself to act on its respective audience. The compositions do so, I argue, by deploying special literary devices that encourage their audiences to invest themselves, emotionally and imaginatively, in the practices of self-development that the works themselves advocate. The aim of the project is to use Patrul’s writing as a case study to suggest modes of analysis that can offer us insight into the ways in which specially designed modes of writing enable moral self-cultivation.

The dissertation specifically addresses the relationship between the recurring themes of singularity, performativity and reflexivity as they appear in Patrul’s advice writings. I argue that these compositions employ discursive devices that play on their audience’s feelings and expectations, aspiring to generate affective responses that range from utter hopelessness to profound relief. They employ expositional strategies

designed to compel their audiences to imagine familiar practices anew. Finally, their performative character calls attention to the status of Patrul, the model author, as a singularly capable and skillful teacher. The reflexive nature of Patrul's works thereby serves to provoke the implied audience's imagination about "Patrul" the heroically talented teacher.

These self-reflexive writings also act as devices for Patrul's own self-transformation. They are sites of imagination, opportunities for Patrul to enact a self-creation via the medium of advice writing. Patrul's compositions not only aspire to work on their audience. They, in and of themselves, constitute transformative work *for* Patrul.

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through graduate school. At every step, she has made time for me: pushing me when I needed pushing, encouraging me when I needed encouragement, introducing me when I needed an introduction, and so on. Foolishly or not, Janet has always believed that I could become a good writer, scholar, and intellectual and any small advancements that I have made in those pursuits is solely due to her patience and determination with me. I recognize just how lucky I am to have such a caring mentor, and friend.

Long before I even dreamed of Harvard, my parents were modeling for me lives driven by a curiosity about all things, but most commonly about religion. What a surprise that the son of a gifted acupuncturist—an early experimenter with insight meditation, yoga, and tai chi—would end up studying Asian Religions! My mother's love of learning clearly inspired me well before I even knew that it was happening. My father's penchant for books, ideas, and dinner-table debate has been an equal influence on me. I suppose I never stood a chance.

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## Introduction

This thesis attempts to offer an alternative to the preponderance of attention in Buddhist studies to the content and logic of religious doctrine and practice. It does so by developing the tools for an analysis of how doctrines and practices are compellingly conveyed in particular textual circumstances. It takes as its focus four works of “ethical advice” written by the nineteenth-century Tibetan teacher Dza Patrul Rinpoche (Rdza dpal sprul, O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, 1808-1877). The dissertation provides a rhetorical analysis of these works and endeavors to show how each aspires to reach outside of itself to act on its audience. The compositions do so by virtue of deploying special literary devices that encourage their audiences to invest themselves, emotionally and imaginatively, in the practices of self-development that the works themselves advocate.

Building on recent research in religious studies, this thesis brings together two principal concerns in the field: one regarding rhetorical analysis of religious preaching and instruction, and the other concerning the ways in which religious traditions provide means of ethical self-transformation for their followers. The dissertation works through Dza Patrul Rinpoche’s rhetorical strategies and attempts to identify the means by which his writings serve as technologies of self-development, both for their imagined audience and, indeed, for Patrul himself. In so doing the thesis attends to key textual and interpretational issues regarding the logic and agency of the works—features of textuality that emerge precisely through careful examination of their rhetoric. The aim of the project is to use Patrul’s writing as a case study to suggest

fruitful modes of analysis that give us a rich sense of how moral self-cultivation is enabled through specially designed modes of writing.

Buddhist forms of ethical advice—instructions wherein authors speak to their audiences about the problems with daily life and describe a path for alleviating these problems—are actually widespread in Buddhist literary history. From sermons of the Buddha (*sutta* and *āgama*) to didactic verse-collections (such as the *Dhammapada*, the *Udānavarga*, and *subhāṣita* literature), from instructions to political leaders (*nitīśāstra*), to epistles (*lekha*), to long-form poetic renditions of the path (the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* for example), personal ethical instructions are pervasive in Pāli, Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist literature. Still, contemporary scholarship rarely looks at the literary qualities of works of this sort. Nor does it ask questions about how the pedagogical devices that appear within such compositions might work to engage the attention of their audiences and compel their moral impulses.

In examining one particularly effective example of Buddhist ethical advice writing, this dissertation intends to show how interesting, intricate, and even complex such forms of composition can be, and indeed was, in the particular historical example under discussion. Ethical advice may lack the doctrinal glamour of more demanding philosophical treatises, and may not always provide instances of innovative propositional content. To the contrary, such works often seem to communicate rather introductory ideas and practices. But an analysis of Patrul's advice compositions reveals the persuasive ingenuity that is at play in the course of communicating even the most elementary facets of Buddhist moral cultivation. Beyond merely describing what the student of Buddhism should do, Patrul's writings seek to develop dynamic

emotional and motivational relationships with their audiences. They play on their audience's feelings and expectations, aspiring to generate affective responses that run the gamut between utter hopelessness and profound relief. They employ expositional strategies designed to compel their audiences to imagine familiar practices anew. Exploring the craftsmanship of Patrul's compositions brings into vision the intricacy of religious teaching and provides insight into the ways in which religious traditions can inspire their followers. This thesis will be devoted to investigating the details of such processes, in the hopes of making a case for the value of similar sustained studies of the literary and persuasive dimensions of other Buddhist advice instructions.

Such an investigation attests to the value of attending to what Dominick LaCapra calls the work-like aspects of writings.<sup>1</sup> LaCapra distinguishes between a text's documentary aspects—the propositional content inherent in a work—and a text's work-like function—the techniques that serve to transform an audience by virtue of the rhetorical and persuasive aspects of the writing in question. The focus of LaCapra's reading strategy is the interaction of the propositional and transformative components of a work.<sup>2</sup> In Patrul's compositions, this becomes a question of the relationship between the self-development practices that the texts advocate and the affective and imaginative responses to the instructions that they aspire to generate. By considering the work-like aspect of Patrul's writings and the rhetorical strategies present therein, I will explore how cultivation instructions demand the allegiance of their audience, engender self-confidence in said audience, generate conviction about the possibility

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<sup>1</sup> For LaCapra's theorization of the work-like aspect of texts, see LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History," especially 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and necessity of self-development, and create an intimate relationship between teacher and student.

But the transformative dimension of Patrul's writings is not limited to the skillful manipulations of the audience to which they seem to aspire. I will argue in the final chapter of the dissertation that these forms of discourse also act as devices for Patrul's own self-transformation. They are sites of self-imagination, opportunities for Patrul to enact a self-creation via the medium of advice writing. Patrul's compositions thus not only aspire to work on their audience. They, in and of themselves, constitute transformative work *for* Patrul.

### **Rhetoric in Religious Studies & Buddhist Studies**

By inquiring into the rhetorical elements of Patrul's self-development instructions, this dissertation draws on the study of rhetorical techniques already underway in religious studies scholarship. It also relates that scholarship to another growing interest in the field—the study of religious self-cultivation.

Rhetorical analysis of religious speech as such has been under investigation for some time. An especially compelling example from Baylor University Press's new series of monographs on religion and rhetoric is Gary Selby's fascinating study of the use of biblical rhetoric in the public speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>3</sup> The book tracks how King mapped the African American struggle for civil rights onto the story of the Israelites escape from Egypt, with King coming to embrace the role of Moses, placing himself atop the figurative mountain from where he could see the promised land. This work, like others that focus on the place of biblical narratives in public

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<sup>3</sup> Selby, *Rhetoric of Freedom*.

preaching, calls attention to how certain tropes create dynamic relationships between speaker and audience. As such, it has been influential for the conceptualization of the current thesis. Like King, Patrul repeatedly adopts persona that position him as authoritative, trustworthy, and accessible.

It should not be surprising that religious studies is a good place to find work on rhetoric, persuasion, and the ever shifting relationship between audiences and speakers, communities and their preachers. The reason for this is the historical proximity of the study of Christianity to seminary education and the discipline of homiletics. The field is therefore filled with analyses of historical preachers' sermons. Often such studies focus on the theological content of preachers' words. Still, due to the recognition of preaching as a vocation, even an art, historians of Christianity seem to have a natural comfort with rhetorical analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Also of great interest to the present study is Mark Jordan's work on Christian rhetoric about same-sex love.<sup>5</sup> Jordan plays close attention to the way that "characters" appear in persuasive discourse. Jordan uses the word "character" to refer to the personas and identities, such as the "abominable sinner," that appear in Christian sermons and debates about same-sex love and desire.<sup>6</sup> The word character carries with it three relevant and overlapping meanings.<sup>7</sup> First, it can signify a moral personality. We might comment on a presidential candidate's strong moral character, for example. Second, it can mean an eccentric. "What a character he is!" we might say.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Gerard, ed., *Divine Rhetoric*; Phenix, *Sermons of Joseph of Balai*; Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*. Kenneth Burke's interest in religion and rhetoric has, in particular, had a major impact on the field, though his emphasis on the relationship between metaphorical figures (such as God as lion, father, and king) and the religious imagination is not of specific relevance to the work in this dissertation. See Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*; Westbrook, *Speaking of Gods*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Jordan, *Silence of Sodom*; Jordan, *Telling Truths in Church*; Jordan, *Recruiting Your Love*.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan, *Recruiting Your Love*, xv-xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Jordan, *Telling Truths*.

Third, it can mean a figure in a novel or a script—the character of Lady Macbeth, for instance.

Such insights pertain to the ways in which Patrul, as author of his advice instructions, appears *within* his own instructions. Patrul the teacher, I will argue, is a character created by his own rhetoric. Patrul, as the speaker of his advice, meets all of Jordan’s criteria for a “character.” He is the embodiment of a certain moral personality—someone who has cultivated an ethical commitment (*bodhicitta*) to show others how to overcome suffering. He is an eccentric, behaving in unexpected ways both within the mini-narratives that appear in his advice and in the stories that circulate amongst Tibetans about his life’s exploits. Most importantly, however, he is a figure in his own scripts. Patrul the tireless teacher, the eloquent orator, the humble itinerant, the trustworthy dispenser of advice, is an ever-shifting character in his own advice writings.

As Jordan points out, characters are not simply figures that are named in discourse. Characters are modeled by the speaker and the listener, alike. A successful preacher, for example, projects the characters of the authoritative preacher and the pious congregant through her rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Like the preacher, Patrul works hard to shape his relationship with his audience, to project the character of a witty, capable, and trustworthy guide. I will show how Patrul’s rhetorical strategies serve to create a strong, trusting dynamic between the audience and the (imagined) author of the work. I will likewise show how they strive to establish an emotional intimacy between the audience and the voice of the instructions, the “character” that teaches them how to

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<sup>8</sup> Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love*, xvi.

overcome the suffering of everyday life. The relationship between Patrul as advice-giver and the audience as advice-recipient is thus a dynamic one, created through Patrul's discourse, rather than pre-existing it.

Susan Harding's work on the language of fundamentalism amongst the followers of Jerry Falwell is likewise instructive for the study of Patrul. Harding incorporates a biographical study of Falwell's childhood and subsequent career into her sophisticated analysis of his narrative rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, she treats Falwell's childhood as a discourse created by Falwell's speech. This is evident in her rhetorical reading of instances where Falwell talks about his own past. Here, she pays close attention to the persuasive force of Falwell's appeal to biblical tropes in his portrayals of his own life. But she likewise seeks to understand Falwell's role as an actual human being who leads a massive ministry of other, real human beings. This balance is important for this dissertation's treatment of Patrul's compositions. While my analysis is concerned with the productive effects of his rhetoric as it appears in his written archive, the dissertation will also address Patrul the human being. This will take the form of an introduction to Patrul's career in chapter 1, and an analysis in chapter 5 of how the very act of writing serves as self-development work for Patrul.

The field of Buddhist studies has seen only limited engagement with issues pertaining to the literary and persuasive aspects of instructional literature. However, there have been a few model studies that attend to the work-like nature of Buddhist narrative. Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen's exposition of the configurative capacities of Buddhist *jātaka* stories, and Anne Monius's examination of the effects of

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<sup>9</sup> Harding, *Book of Jerry Falwell*.



Tamil and Sanskrit aesthetic principles in the Tamil narrative *Maṇimēkalai* are two such examples.<sup>10</sup> Alan Cole’s work also focuses on the transformative possibilities of narrative by analyzing the plot of four *Mahāyāna sūtras* (*The Lotus Sūtra*, *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, *The Diamond Sūtra*, and *The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*).<sup>11</sup> Cole argues that these compositions are primarily concerned with seducing their audiences through the use of paternalistic imagery and aspire to persuade readers to devote their “allegiances” to these new texts.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Hallisey, Hansen, and Monius, however, Cole suggests that the rhetorical force of the plot supersedes any normative claims made therein. Such claims are, in his words, merely “epiphenomenal.”<sup>13</sup> For Cole, *Mahāyāna sūtras* are all form, no content. In contrast to Cole’s conclusion, I will argue that the normative content of Patrul’s advice compositions—namely the self-development practices promoted within them—is in harmony with the rhetorical devices employed. In Patrul’s works, form and content are intimately intertwined.

In studies of East Asian Buddhism, Bernard Faure’s analysis of the rhetorical facet of historical claims to the soteriological superiority of the “sudden” path to enlightenment has had significant influence, particularly in studies of Chan and Zen writings and practices.<sup>14</sup> Of more relevance to the current work, however, is John Keenan’s study of Mou-tzu’s *Treatise On Alleviating Doubt* (Ch: *Mou-tzu Li-huo lun*).<sup>15</sup> In contrast to prior studies of the work that exclusively attended its doctrinal content and provenance, Keenan emphasizes the dynamic pedagogical qualities of the work—what

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<sup>10</sup> Hallisey and Hansen, “Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life.”; Monius, “Literary Theory and Moral Vision.”

<sup>11</sup> Cole, *Text as Father*.

<sup>12</sup> Cole, *Text as Father*, 2, 12, 339.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>14</sup> Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*. For recent work on rhetoric in the Zen tradition, see Anderl, ed., *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric*.

<sup>15</sup> Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes our Doubts*.

the text “does,” rather than what it “means.”<sup>16</sup> This present study benefits from the clarity with which Keenan both introduces and carries out his investigation of what the Mou-tzu dialogue “does” to an audience.

In thinking about Patrul’s writings as mechanisms for teaching, this dissertation connects with a growing curiosity in the field about Buddhist pedagogy. Thus far, this interest has primarily taken the form of historical studies of the status and techniques of Buddhist preachers. Called *dharmabhāṇakas*, preachers seem to have occupied a privileged position in early Buddhist communities. Studies of *dharmabhāṇakas* have largely been historical in nature, attempting to accurately represent the occupation and social role of these figures.<sup>17</sup> More importantly for my work, however, is the peripheral attention that these projects have given to *techniques* of preaching the dharma. As some studies show, Buddhist communities have developed their own tradition of homiletics. Treatises like Vasubandhu’s *Vyakhyāyukti* lay out schematic ideals that informed generations of Buddhist preachers, including Patrul.<sup>18</sup> This thesis thus benefits from the growing work about Buddhist preachers, and the related topics of Buddhist homiletics, Buddhist pedagogy, and Buddhist instructional literature (including monographs recently published by Justin McDaniel and Ann Blackburn).<sup>19</sup>

As a sustained analysis of those aspects of Buddhist instruction that actively engage their audiences, this dissertation expands on the work of these scholars. It strives to demonstrate what an extensive study of the persuasive dimensions of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>17</sup> See Deegalle, *Popularizing Buddhism*; Drewes, “Mahāyāna Sūtras and Their Preachers.”; Nance, “Models of Teaching.”; Nance, “Indian Buddhist Preachers.”; Overbey, “Memory, rhetoric, and education.”

<sup>18</sup> For discussions of the technical vocabulary surrounding preaching in Indian Buddhist literature, see Braarvig, “Dhāraṇī and Pratibhāna.”; MacQueen, “Inspired Speech.”; Nance, “Indian Buddhist Preachers.”; Overbey, “Memory, rhetoric, and education.”

<sup>19</sup> For the study of Buddhist pedagogical manuals, see McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves*; Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice*.

instructional discourse can show us that cannot be seen otherwise: the complex interplay of authorial voice, persuasive tropes, and the imaginative and affective responses of ideal audiences. In order to do so, my work appeals to a wide variety of theoretical sources.

## Theoretical Facets of the Analysis

As Martha Nussbaum has argued, in a “carefully written and fully imagined” text, one often finds an “organic connection between its form and its content.”<sup>20</sup> Going even further, she claims that a text’s style of exposition often makes its own kind of argument, an argument that cannot be made via any other means. In her words, literary form “expresses its own sense of what matters.”<sup>21</sup> Her claims hold true for Patrul’s “carefully written” advice instructions.

For example, Patrul’s advice writings appeal again and again to the trope of “the singularly essential.” They repeatedly speak about singular and essential practices—the one practice on which one should focus all of one’s energies (though Patrul’s compositions speak this way of many different practices!). The theme of the singular reappears in the expository strategies that Patrul uses in concert with this goal. One of Patrul’s texts, for instance, takes the form of massive demonstration of how myriad Buddhist categories can be reduced down to the singular phenomenon of one’s mind.<sup>22</sup> Within this demonstration it elucidates how the Three Jewels (the Buddha, his teachings, and his community) are all to be found in one single thing: one’s guru, whose

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<sup>20</sup> Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, “Gdol pa'i drang strong gi gtam,” in *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 272-289. This work will be analyzed in chapter 3.

mind, it later argues, is not different from one's own. The Buddha, his teachings, and his community are thereby present in one's mind, it ultimately concludes.<sup>23</sup> Moving from a multitude to a singularity, the text explains how one thing, like one's guru, can contain the essence of multiple things. This condensation strategy, showing one essential (singular) thing to contain within it many others, goes hand in hand with its presentation of potent, all-encompassing practices, practices that contain within them the efficacy of all others combined. The form of Patrul's works thus has an intimate relationship with the content of his works. Their condensation expositions, where they unpacks multiform categories in order to arrive at a singular phenomenon, work conjointly with their claims to be delivering singularly essential instructions.

The mirroring of form and content in Patrul's works has significant functional implications. Per Nussbaum's suggestion, Patrul's condensation form makes a powerful statement about what matters and why. His strategy for exposition shows his audience how, and why, the practices that he advocates are so singularly potent. The strategy also reflects back on Patrul himself. In effect it authorizes Patrul as a capable source of powerful practice instructions, as someone who can handle the overwhelming variety of Buddhist instructions and translate them into an accessible form.

This mirroring of form and content further justifies a rhetorical approach to Patrul's compositions. By taking a doctrinal approach to Patrul's works, one would be able to extract from his corpus of writings evidence about the history of Tibetan Buddhist self-cultivation practices, thus contributing to the growing archive of religious approaches to embodied practice. One could likewise recognize Patrul's

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<sup>23</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 277-281.

affiliation with certain lineages of practice, his affinity for certain religious arguments about the status of the guru, and his appeal to certain philosophical arguments about the nature of one's mind; one might even try to construct a practical philosophy out his statements about the hopelessness of everyday life and the ethical value of simple, solitary practice. But by treating Patrul's ethical instructions as sources of content (arguments, doctrines, practices) without attending to the complex logic of his rhetoric, one would miss the dynamic nature of his works. Patrul's compositions, I will argue, do not exist simply to deliver content. Rather, they clearly aspire to reach out to their audiences, binding them to the practices that the compositions advocate and to the authoritative, trustworthy, and capable author who guides them through these practices. The rhetorical impact of these works immediately strikes the reader as central to the entire message and virtually demands our attention as analysts.

Patrul's compositions, in addition to motivating their audiences to take up self-development practices, also provoke reflections about the nature of their medium, and in so doing highlight the role of the author himself. The dissertation will devote extensive analysis to the plentiful strategies at play in Patrul's compositions for calling attention to the skillful and trustworthy transmission of ethical instruction. Rather than focusing on Patrul the historical author of these works, much of the following analysis will concentrate on authorial voice—the manner in which each work presents itself as speaking authoritatively. This study will focus particularly closely on the many reflexive moments in Patrul's works, where the texts call attention to themselves as masterful instructions. In the final chapter, it will also consider how such self-reflexivity relates back onto the historical person of Patrul.

Several chapters of the dissertation will elucidate the varied appearances and functions of the reflexive aspects of the compositions. One such function is to establish Patrul's teachings as performances of what anthropologist Richard Bauman terms "verbal art." In his book *Verbal Art as Performance*, Bauman calls attention to the different arenas within which members of a given culture engage in specially designated modes of speech. The term "verbal art" is used for modes of speaking where there is "a concern with the form of expression, over and above the needs of communication."<sup>24</sup> Verbal art uses "the devices of language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention."<sup>25</sup>

These two qualifications apply well to Patrul's style of advice writing. First, Patrul is without question concerned with the form of his expression beyond the minimal requirements for communicating his content. Why, one might wonder, would Patrul go to such lengths to develop elaborate expositions only to communicate simple instructions? If the practices that he advocates are as simple as he claims them to be, why does he compose so many different elaborations about why one should practice them? Were Patrul only concerned with communicating content, his advice compositions would most assuredly not look like they do.

Second, Patrul's compositions, and their reflexivity in particular, attract attention to the devices of language that they employ. As Barbara Babcock has argued, performances entail metacommunication—elements of discourse that call attention to speech events as performance.<sup>26</sup> Typical examples of metacommunication (what Bauman calls "keys") are the use of figurative language, the use of archaic language,

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<sup>24</sup> Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Babcock, "Metanarration in Folk Narrative."

formulas that mark genres (“once upon a time . . .”), and disclaimers by the performer of her own inadequacy. Moments of reflexivity in Patrul’s compositions, alternation between prose and verse, modest statements of incompetence, and other markers that I will flag during the subsequent analysis of the works in question, all do this work of framing Patrul’s advice instructions as performances, as verbal art.

There are a few consequences to reading Patrul’s advice compositions as verbal art. This perspective sensitizes us to the ways in which Patrul signals to his audience that he is performing for them. It also changes the way in which we can expect his audience to have responded to the works. As Babcock argues, metacommunication calls attention to the relationship between the performer (the narrator of folk stories, in the case of her work) and the audience.<sup>27</sup> Once an audience recognizes a performative frame, once it is cued to recognize itself as an audience for a display of verbal art, certain consequences tend to follow. Audience members know that the performance will entail a message that should be understood in a non-literal way. The performer can also be held accountable for communicating skillfully, above and beyond simply getting across some content. The performance thus becomes subject to evaluation by its audience—something that we will see explicitly dramatized within one of Patrul’s compositions. Finally, performances of verbal art typically present the possibility for an audience to experience enhanced enjoyment.

Verbal art thus makes demands on the performer, as well. The performer assumes a sense of responsibility to her audience to display communicative competence, competence that requires knowledge and an ability to speak in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 66.

appropriate ways. As I will point out, Patrul is keenly sensitive to this responsibility and takes both explicit and implicit positions on what such knowledge and ability entails.

Bauman's writing on verbal art and performance serves as an important buffer to this dissertation's emphasis on persuasion. I offer readings of four compositions that take seriously the logic and arrangement of Patrul's rhetorical tropes, tropes that serve persuasive purposes that we can theorize and articulate. But I also recognize Patrul's compositions to be examples of Tibetan verbal art. While I will explore Patrul's pedagogical reasons for calling attention to his own status as author, or for performing a complex reduction of myriads of categories down to one singular essence, there are also other reasons for these moves. They are also displays of mastery for mastery's sake, examples of verbal art that bring both Patrul and his audience enjoyment. Not unlike the lectures of "celebrity" professors on campus, Patrul's persuasive performances are as entertaining as they are enlightening.

Recognizing Patrul's compositions as verbal art also situates this dissertation within a growing fascination in Tibetan studies with Tibetan "literature." A group of scholars have recently organized an annual seminar at the American Academy of Religion called "Religion and the Literary in Tibet," with additional meetings periodically scheduled outside of the AAR format.<sup>28</sup> This group has faced the challenge of how to use the heuristic category of "literature" to provoke new categorizations of the different forms of Tibetan composition and to bring more sustained literary analysis to Tibetan works than has previously been present in the field.

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://tiblit.wordpress.com/> for information on this seminar, which is scheduled to meet at the American Academy of Religion from 2010-2014.



Bauman's reflections on verbal art are suggestive for these tasks. As Bauman recognizes, one finds verbal art in different places in different cultures. He takes upon himself the challenge, as an anthropologist, of thinking about what range of speech activity (oral as well as written) is susceptible to performance within a given culture. Bauman's criteria for "verbal art" might serve the Tibetan literature group well, allowing it to look beyond compositions that look like European literature to find other places within Tibetan culture(s) where performance is valued.

We know, for example, that competitive public preaching has long been a field for verbal performance in Tibetan cultural areas. R.A. Stein notes such competitions referenced in an early Tibetan historical chronicle called the *Sba bzhed*, where he notes the mention of "talking matches" that occurred in the ninth century at Samye monastery.<sup>29</sup> Dan Martin has also discussed competitive talking as one of nine Tibetan "sports" ("nine different games for men," *pho rtsed sna dgu*) that also include archery, foot racing, wrestling and others.<sup>30</sup> I do not think that it is a stretch to connect Patrul's advice compositions, and similar advice works (*zhal gdams*) by other Tibetan authors, to this tradition of public performative speech.<sup>31</sup> At the very least, such works (*zhal gdams* and *gtam tshogs*) are a potentially rich archive for the future study of Tibetan verbal art.

Of course, reading Patrul's writings as verbal art and reading them as persuasive discourse are not mutually exclusive. As Aristotle theorized, entertainment and the display of mastery are effective modes of rhetoric. *Ethos* and *pathos*—generating confidence in the authority and trustworthiness of the speaker (*ethos*), and

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<sup>29</sup> Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 255.

<sup>30</sup> Dan Martin, "The Tibetan Olympics of 1695. Nine Men's Sporting Events," *Tibeto-Logic* (blog), <http://tibeto-logic.blogspot.com/>

<sup>31</sup> Many thanks to Jann Ronis for this suggestion and for referring me to Dan Martin's blog entry.

manipulating an audience's emotions, even delighting them (*pathos*)—are two of the three means of persuasion in his *Rhetoric*.<sup>32</sup> There is therefore no reason to choose between Patrul's performances as either persuasive or as entertainment. What makes them so compelling is that they achieve both ends.

Patrul's life-advice compositions, as persuasive verbal art, thus send a variety of signals to their audiences about the status of their author. But, as I will argue, the reflexive and performative aspects of these compositions likewise function as mechanisms by which Patrul constitutes himself as a trustworthy teacher.

One normally thinks about performances as displays created by performers. Judith Butler's theorization of gender performativity helps us to recognize how this can be otherwise, however. In Butler's influential work, the term "performativity" names the process whereby "sexed and gendered subjects are continuously constituted," a process that is not necessarily intentional or deliberate.<sup>33</sup> In Butler's view, human beings unconsciously take on gender roles through the repetition of norms. By repeating such norms, which are learned from one's culture but are never fixed, one develops the *habitus* of one's gender. One's status as a man, a woman or otherwise is thus dependent on learned, bodily ways of interacting with the world. One's capacity to play one's gendered role, one's capability to act, feel, and identify as male, female, or otherwise, is an "embodied result of the reiteration of norms."<sup>34</sup> Such a feel for being a gender comes about through repeated performances.

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of Aristotelian rhetoric and the categories of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*, see Kennedy, *New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 4-5, 57ff. For a sustained treatment of the latter two categories, see Wisse, *Ethos and Pathos*. Ryan Overbey also addresses these categories with respect to the rhetorical facets of a Buddhist homiletic manual. See Overbey, "Memory, rhetoric, and education," 191ff.

<sup>33</sup> Hollywood, "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization," 94.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

Performances (reiterations of social norms) constitute performers (gendered subjects), rather than the other way around. The human subject is not truly a subject *until* it repeatedly (what Butler would call ritually) performs its roles. One only becomes a male subject, for example, once one learns the embodied feel for being a male, a feel that is accomplished (temporarily) through repetitive performance. Because of the dynamic relationship between performer and performance, there is always the possibility for new subjectivities to emerge: as the performances change over time, the feel for being such a performer changes.

Building on Butler's theorization of the performative aspect of subjectivity-formation, I will conclude the dissertation with a reading of Patrul's advice works as sites for such work. In this sense, Patrul the (pre-formed) teacher does not teach his students. Rather Patrul's teachings participate in the creation of "Patrul" the skillful guru. They create the performer in the eyes of the audience—the trustworthy teacher whose advice is worth following. But they also help to mold Patrul's self-identity as a spiritual guide. His performances help to constitute his "teacher-subjectivity," a way of being that extends beyond the confines of his texts. His self-reflexive, discursive creations thus generate an opportunity for both he and his audience to imagine "Patrul" the ideal guide: as a performer constituted by his performances, a teacher constituted by his teachings.

## Patrul Rinpoche as Case-Study

Best remembered today as the author of a set of ethical instructions called *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (*Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*),<sup>35</sup> Patrul Rinpoche was renowned during his life in Eastern Tibet for his brilliant oratory and matchless skill at delivering Buddhist teachings. He is commonly identified as a model Buddhist teacher by prominent contemporary Tibetans, including no less an authority than the Dalai Lama.<sup>36</sup> His enduring influence is such that his teachings frequently appear (in translation) on “Eastern Philosophy” bookshelves in the United States and are regularly transmitted during meditation workshops for aspiring American Buddhists.<sup>37</sup>

In investigating the compositions of this supposedly brilliant ethical instructor, I was mildly puzzled to find that many of Patrul’s works seemed to be delivering the same basic instructions. These compositions, which fall under the broad category of “advice” (Tib. *zhal gdams*, *gtam tshogs*), provide condensed summaries of the Buddhist path to liberation, emphasizing the same few practices again and again. If one were to pen a book-jacket-endorsement of Patrul’s advice instructions, one might be tempted to say that Patrul excels at continually finding new ways to teach the basics. So why do Tibetans identify Patrul as such a gifted teacher? What is so special about a teacher who teaches the basics, over and over again? What is it about Patrul’s “nectar-like teachings,” to quote one contemporary Tibetan scholar, that are so inspiring?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For the work in translation, see Patrul, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. For the composition in Tibetan, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Dalai Lama, *Dzogchen*, 44; Dalai Lama, *The Essential Dalai Lama*, 215.

<sup>37</sup> Best-selling author Pema Chödrön has assigned Patrul’s teachings in her workshops, for example. For references to Patrul in Chödrön’s published materials, see Chödrön, *Start Where You Are*, 179; Chödrön, *Places That Scare You*, 65, 90, 116.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Tulku Thondup, 9/10/08.

My strategy for answering these questions has been to engage in a close reading of the rhetorical dynamics—the persuasive strategies, the expository techniques, and the experiments with authorial voice—that appear in Patrul’s religious instructions. While drawing from examples from across Patrul’s *oeuvre*, the dissertation will focus on four of Patrul’s advice compositions. These four works are brief, with the longest amounting to fourteen pages. Written in accessible verse, they deliver, in the words of their composer, singular instructions—instructions that convey only the most essential points of Buddhist practice. Patrul infuses these instructions with rich rhetoric and sophisticated strategies of persuasion, however. By examining the rhetorical tropes of these compositions in depth, we will gain insight into the world of Tibetan Buddhist religious instruction, an arena in which Patrul flourished.

In many ways, Patrul is an obvious choice for a study of the persuasive power of religious rhetoric. Patrul enjoyed a reputation as a gifted teacher and ethical role model both amongst his contemporaries and subsequent generations of Tibetan Buddhists. His works have appeared in multiple Tibetan anthologies of exemplary Tibetan compositions and advice writings.<sup>39</sup> Prominent Tibetan Buddhist teachers have also used his compositions as models for teaching themselves how to improve their own writing skills.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, Tibetans themselves identify Patrul as an especially skilled author of didactic works.

What makes Patrul a doubly compelling choice is his awareness of his own gifts as a teacher. Patrul’s self-consciousness about what constitutes skillful instruction emerges, at times overtly, in his writings. Such moments betray his concern for what

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<sup>39</sup> Blo bzang chos grags and Bsod nams rtse mo, eds., *Rtsom yig gser gyi sbam bu*; Lha mkhar tshe ring, ed., *Rtsom yig gces bsdus*; Blo gros rgyal mtshan, ed., *Blo sbyong dang zhal gdams*.

<sup>40</sup> Dilgo Khyentse, *Brilliant Moon*, 65.

makes a discourse eloquent and authoritative, digestible and yet dense with meaning. My concerns about the dynamic mechanics of religious instructions overlap, to a great extent, with Patrul's own interest in the best ways to deliver religious advice. A case-study of Patrul therefore affords us the opportunity to query the rhetorical dynamic of religious instructions while also gaining insight into a teacher's own perspective about what might be valuable about his pedagogical methods.

Patrul's activity in the mid-nineteenth century also places him at an important moment in the transmission of Buddhist teachings to the West. On the one hand, he taught in a very different milieu than our own. He taught to Tibetan nomads, for example. He also taught to monks for whom it was entirely realistic to follow Patrul's petitions to abandon one's social responsibilities in favor of meditating in a cave. On the other hand, many contemporary Tibetan lamas who have taught Western audiences identify Patrul and his teachings as part of their spiritual lineage and attempt to teach in his style, despite the dramatic difference in the environment in which they operate. Patrul's teaching style is quite literally part of their religious inheritance. An inquiry into Patrul's rhetoric is therefore also a good way to learn about the persuasive strategies relied upon by contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teachers in our own culture.

Most importantly, however, Patrul's works prove themselves to be worthy objects for a sustained study of religious rhetoric on their own terms. They display, in many cases, a great elegance of form. They employ interdependent tropes that work efficiently together for broader persuasive effect. And they display complex layers of reflexivity, mirroring form and content and calling attention to the authoritative

presence of their own author. In a sense, they constitute the perfect opportunity to unpack the methods and assumptions that are necessary for the scholar to discern the manifold relations between religious rhetoric and practices of religious self-cultivation. In this regard, I hope that the reflections in this thesis will have relevance not only for Tibetan studies and Buddhist studies, but also for the larger field of the study of religion.

### **The Historical Author and his Implied Audience**

In querying the persuasive dimensions of Patrul's advice works, we will need to be as precise as possible about the ways that their rhetorical strategies function. Questions arise about how best to describe the persuasive process present in these dynamic compositions—questions pertaining to both the agent of the rhetorical moves and the patient upon which the devices act. Is the agent who applies these strategies the historical Patrul, a human being with explicit intentions? To what extent is Patrul aware of the function of the specific discursive devices found in the composition, given their historical employment in other texts? Is it more accurate to assign agency to the compositions as whole? And upon whom do these discursive mechanisms act? Upon historical individuals who have either heard or read the work? Upon ideal readers, model readers, implied readers?

My approach to these questions will be multiform—with each methodological decision serving a different function. In chapter 1, I will briefly explore what we know about Patrul himself, the author of the advice works at the heart of this study. In addition to providing empirical background on this historical human being, chapter 1 will situate Patrul's advice works within a long history of Buddhist persuasive self-

development instructions. It will also identify the wide variety of historical audiences that he addressed over his career. This will entail some speculative thoughts about likely audiences for the specific advice works in question, beyond the limited information we possess about who actually listened to, read, and studied them. In sum, chapter 1 will provide information about the advice works as historical documents—introducing Patrul as an historical human being who composed works for historical audiences.

Yet, discussing Patrul and his students as historical agents and patients does not sufficiently capture the intentions of this study. For the majority of the dissertation, my analysis will strategically focus on the virtual interaction between text and audience. It is here that we can most clearly see the ambitious aspirations of these works. I will therefore frequently refer to the compositions themselves as agents, rather than to Patrul and his intentions. I do so, in part, because isolating Patrul's authorial intention is theoretically problematic. As I will point out when possible, Patrul inherits any number of rhetorical tropes from the past. It is untenable to say he is always the originator of his discourse, which makes it equally problematic to assume that he always "intends" for such tropes, or expository structures to do the work that I claim they aspire to do. That is to say, Patrul may well have used techniques within his compositions without ever having the thought "I intend to use this trope to accomplish this end."

With that said, I do not reject the possibility that Patrul did self-consciously *choose* certain modes of discourse from amongst the many available to him. There are many moments where his authorial activity—specifically his choices—can be shown to



be front and center in the works. So, while I will primarily concern myself with the activity of the composition, in the abstract, I will also call attention to those moments where we can see Patrul, the self-conscious composer, at work.

To summarize, before addressing my methodological terminology, my primary mode of analysis will be to attend to how each work, and the tropes that appear within each work, *aspires* to configure its audience's reactions. Still, this approach recognizes that the question of "who is aspiring" can be answered in multiple ways. I therefore deliberately demur before reducing my answer to one single approach. As I will explore, the grey area that emerges between Patrul the historical human being, the compositions that he composed, and the inherited tropes that appear within his writings, is itself an interesting phenomenon to consider.

My work makes use of any number of theoretical reflections on authorship. Of primary import are Michel Foucault's observations about the author-function.<sup>41</sup> For Foucault, the intention of historical authors—the thoughts that go on in their heads—are of less interest than the ways in which these author's writings present the audience with a form of an author. That is to say, compositions themselves position the author in different ways, depending on the implied rules of their form of discourse. The author of a newspaper editorial is positioned differently than the author of a news brief, which may well be positioned differently than the author of a live-report on television. In each case, one can describe the author-function as the way in which the purported creator of discourse speaks from a position of authority, or truth. For

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<sup>41</sup> See Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

Foucault, every text has an implicit author-function, whether or not it is intentionally construed by a thinking agent.

Part of the work of this thesis will be to bring to light the techniques whereby Patrul's works actively generate a specific author-function in the service of a larger rhetorical agenda. To emphasize the proactive, strategic nature of the author-function in Patrul's compositions, I will appeal to Umberto Eco's idea of the "model author." This model author is the authorial voice produced by and through the text. It is the voice that speaks through the work—whether it speaks affectionately, imperiously, or slyly.<sup>42</sup>

But again, some caution is required. While I will often speak about the model author as it is produced by the text, there are important moments in Patrul's compositions where the works overtly call into question the role of the teacher giving instructions. In one example, to be analyzed in chapter 4, the work explicitly brings Patrul himself, named by a character in the composition as the source of the discourse delivered therein, into the discussion. The very relationship between authorial voice and empirical author is a question that the text raises itself. While Patrul's works may not use the vocabulary of "author-function" and "model author," they nonetheless repeatedly call attention to status of the teacher who delivers the advice instructions that constitute the text.

In brief, I will begin in chapter 1 with Patrul the historical figure and the historical tradition of discourse within which he participates. In chapters 2-4, I will focus on the compositions as agents, all the while addressing the model authors that

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<sup>42</sup> Eco, *Six Walks*, 15.

appear in these works. Finally, in chapter 5, I will return to Patrul the historical figure, asking how the reflexive turn within his writings relates to him as an empirical human being. This concluding chapter thus brings my considerations of Patrul as historical figure and Patrul as model author into conversation with one another. Here, I suggest that the very *act* of writing in a reflexive mode serves as a technique of self-constitution for the historical figure Patrul. The (productive) tension between “Patrul” as author-function and Patrul as historical human being is the fuel that drives these concluding remarks.

When describing the rhetorical activity of Patrul’s works, I will also speak about the effects of the literary devices that they wield. But, one might wonder, who experiences such effects? After briefly identifying some of the historical audiences for Patrul’s teachings in chapter 1, I turn the attention of the analysis in chapters 2-4 to the “implied audience” of Patrul’s advice writing. This term appears commonly in reader-response theory, in particular in the speculative work of Wolfgang Iser. For Iser, the “the implied reader” is a reader who participates in a process of collaboration with an author.<sup>43</sup> For Iser, this reader has implied needs that are met via an interaction with the text. The implied reader is best understood as the theoretical participant who “seizes the opportunities” provided by the text.<sup>44</sup> Iser is therefore interested in understanding the interaction between a text and those who actively engage with it. His method is not to ask historical readers how they experience the texts that they read, however. Rather, Iser focuses on what *could* happen, given the literary mechanisms present in the text.

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<sup>43</sup> See Iser, *Implied Reader*.

<sup>44</sup> Goldknopf, “Review,” 103.

The idea of an implied reader shares some features with Eco's model reader. The model reader is a possible audience member who is able to competently interpret the expressions made in the text: someone who understands the language used and its specialized references, and is familiar with its literary style.<sup>45</sup> Eco shares with Iser a sense that the text helps to construct this implied reader, which is to say that a text addresses its readers in a certain way, thereby framing their potential responses. As Eco argues, a text forcefully restricts the ways in which its audience can use it.<sup>46</sup> Eco emphasizes that the model reader is produced by instructions in the text.<sup>47</sup> Both Eco and Iser imply that if one reads a text carefully enough, one can determine how a composition directs its audience members to react.

In chapters 2-4, I will concern myself with the interaction between Patruľ's compositions and their implied audiences. I will assume such virtual audience members are capable of understanding Patruľ's vocabulary and references, and will pay close attention to the ways in which the works instruct their implied audiences to respond—emotionally and imaginatively. Of course, one can always argue that historical, empirical readers may have responded to these texts in ways not articulated in my readings. I do not make an attempt to reconstruct the historical reader reception of these works, outside from acknowledging in chapter 1 the very fact of historical audiences actively engaging with these works. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which the works aspire to configure their implied audience members' reactions, how they engage such implied audiences and try to elicit responses.

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<sup>45</sup> Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 7-8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Eco, *Six Walks*, 15.

A terminological note is also in order, here. Because historical people have engaged with Patrul's works in both written and oral forms—by which I mean to say that they have consulted written versions of the work and have heard oral recitations (and explanations) of the compositions—it would be somewhat misleading to repeatedly refer to Patrul's audiences as “readers.” I will thus use the term “implied audience” rather than “implied reader” or “model reader.” By “implied audience” I will mean the competent, engaged person that the text impels to respond in a specific fashion.

My interest in the ideal audience of Patrul's works grows out a concern for the textual and rhetorical logic of religious instructions. A crucial conceit of the dissertation is that we, as close readers and scholars, *are* capable of discerning the logic of these works. This means that we can make reasoned claims about the ways in which the works construct ideal audiences and compel them to respond; and how the compositions generate model authors through the use of rhetorical characters. This interpretive agenda—an exploration of the dynamic of rhetorical logic, implied audience, and model author—entails interpretation of the interaction between a variety of elements in the works. It demands paying attention to content (normative claims about the world made within the works), structure (the ways in which these claims are ordered in the work), and form (the tropes employed). As I will argue repeatedly, the rhetorical logic of Patrul's works strives to transform its implied audience by configuring the audience's attitudes towards both the practices suggested and the model authors constructed by the works.

In sorting through these interdependent categories of rhetorical logic, implied audience, and model author, I aspire to theorize how religious instructions can ideally function as technologies for moral cultivation. Instructions such as Patrul's do not merely advocate practices that have the capacity to transform human beings. I will also argue that the instructions themselves strive to change their ideal audiences in the very process of interacting with the texts—configuring their emotions, engaging their imaginations, and challenging them to think anew about familiar religious categories. Finally, as I will consider in chapter 5, such works may also work to transform their authors.

## **Chapter Overviews**

In short, this dissertation takes a rhetorical approach to the study of four short ethical instructions, in service of thinking about how religious teachers motivate and inspire their audiences to take up self-cultivation exercises. In so doing, I offer interpretations of Patrul's rhetoric within the context of each composition as a whole. Beginning in chapter 2, the dissertation addresses the relationship between the recurring themes of singularity, performativity and reflexivity. In each chapter, it specifically attends to the ways in which Patrul's compositions aspire to both mold their implied audiences' attitudes towards advocated practices, and to lead them to develop a feeling of trust and confidence in the teacher of such practices.

## **Chapter 1: Patrul Rinpoche and Advice**

Chapter 1 offers an overview of Patrul Rinpoche's life and introduces the subject matter of the dissertation: his life-advice compositions. The chapter situates these

works within Patrul's specific career as well as within the larger history of Buddhist ethical writing. The chapter argues that both Patrul's multiform career and his collected writings reveal his central concern for developing skillful ways to teach diverse audiences. These concerns are voiced in the advice compositions at the center of the dissertation, at times explicitly. The chapter explores Patrul's various positions as a teacher throughout his career, the pre-existing models that influenced his adoption of such positions, and his intellectual interests as they intersect with his teaching career. In particular, it problematizes the anti-institutional and anti-social impulses that are evident in his career and his writings.

## **Chapter 2: The *Maṇi*—Patrul and *Pathos***

Chapter 2 explores the rhetorical logic of Patrul's well-known advice work, *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End* (*Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam*). This chapter explicates the expository structure of the composition, showing how the text appeals to tropes of hopelessness, refuge, and singularity, in order to manipulate the emotions of its implied audience. It argues that the work, by arranging common Buddhist tropes in a specific way, leads its audience from feelings of despair to hope to comfort. The chapter thus shows how the composition aspires to compel its audience to invest itself *emotionally* in the simple yet potent practices that it advocates.

The hopelessness evoked by the cynical rhetoric that appears in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End* and the promise of its singularity rhetoric, seem at odds with one another in the composition, however. Why would an audience trust that the simple practice that the work advocates is truly capable of overcoming all of the problems that the same work so passionately portrays? Why, in other words, would the

ideal audience consider the composition's instructions to be trustworthy and effective, especially in light of text's seeming hopelessness about anyone being trustworthy in the first place? The chapter concludes that the work is able to establish its model author's authority as a trustworthy voice of advice and unpacks how that effect is achieved.

### **Chapter 3: The Singular—Reflexivity of Form and Content**

Chapter 3 analyzes Patrul's *Discourse of an Outcast Sage* (*Gdol pa'i drang srong gi gtam*) and continues the work of explaining the reflexivity of Patrul's advice compositions. In this case, reflexivity pertains to the intimate relationship between form and content in the composition's presentation of "singularly essential" self-cultivation practices. Despite the simplicity of these "singularly essential practices," the text uses a complicated form of persuasive argumentation that I will call "condensation rhetoric." Such rhetoric aims to engage its implied audience's imagination about the potency of specific self-development practices. This chapter explores why the work would appeal to a confoundingly complex expositional structure in order to explain such apparently simple practices.

As I will argue, the form that Patrul chooses for this composition allows the text to accomplish two goals. First, its performative quality calls attention to the status of Patrul, the model author, as a singularly capable and skillful teacher, constructing a persona for Patrul through which the instructions are voiced. Second, the condensation rhetoric itself offers a persuasive logic for why the practices that the text advocates are so potent. This chapter thus builds on chapter 2's theorization of the



tendency of Patrul's works to call attention to themselves as works of a skillful and trustworthy teacher.

#### **Chapter 4: Confident Eloquence—Reflexivity of Teacher & Text**

Chapter 4 explicates Patrul's humorous work *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* (*Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*). In this chapter, I explore Patrul's self-consciousness about of his own responsibilities as a performer of ethical teachings. In so doing, I further theorize the experiments with reflexivity, authorial voice, and performance that appear in Patrul's advice compositions more broadly. The chapter shows the elegant and engaging ways in which Patrul's reflexive writing calls attention to its author. This entails a particularly masterful move that compels the work's implied audience to heroize Patrul as a uniquely capable teacher. The composition's forceful rhetoric reaches out to the implied audience members in order to beckon them into a trusting relationship with "Patrul," the authoritative voice that appears as a figure in its own right in this work.

#### **Chapter 5: Patrul's Persona—From Authorial Voice to Historical Author**

Chapter 5 returns to Patrul's life to consider how his persona as a skillful spiritual guide, a persona created out of his reflexive advice compositions, relates to his actual life as a Buddhist teacher. As I argue in chapter 4, the reflexive strategy of Patrul's works serves to provoke the ideal audience's imagination about "Patrul" the heroically skillful teacher. However, the cynical claims about the hopelessness of

helping others that are ubiquitous in his compositions call into question the very possibility of anyone, even such a heroic teacher, successfully benefiting others.

This chapter considers the apparent conflict between these two themes by explicating a short passage of instructions, which I will refer to as Patrul's "Six Condensed Points of Profound Essential Advice," (*Gdams zab gnad kyi mdo 'gags drug*). This set of stanzas appears in one of Patrul's biographies. Patrul's biographer uses this passage of advice to explain Patrul's decision to renounce his inherited position as the head of a monastic estate. This moment in the biography thus introduces us to the complex interplay between Patrul's life and Patrul's words in Tibetans' conception of him.

For Patrul's biographer, Patrul the human being is the embodiment of the teachings that appear in his advice compositions. Building off of this understanding, the chapter considers how the practice of composing reflexive advice compositions serves as a way for Patrul to fashion himself as a Buddhist teacher. Patrul's works not only create a trustworthy persona for their audience, but they provide a framework within which Patrul can theoretically construct his own subjectivity as a skillful transmitter of ethical instructions.

## Chapter 1: Patrul Rinpoche and Advice

Patrul Rinpoche, respected composer of advice works, spent his career experimenting with different models of Buddhist teaching. By investigating Patrul's life and work, this chapter will paint the picture of an historical figure conscious of the demands of effectively reaching a wide variety of audiences. Patrul, I argue, was fascinated with crafting a life for himself as a successful teacher to all. This interest is apparent in certain self-conscious moments in his writings about the challenge of proper preaching, in the wide variety of social positions from which he taught others, and in the diversity of forms of writing dedicated to delivering instructions about the path to liberation found in his collected works.

### Sources for Patrul's Life

There are numerous renditions of Patrul's life, accomplishments, and inspiring qualities. The vast majority of them lead back to three primary sources, however, all composed by Patrul's contemporaries and students. The first is a moderately short hagiography (*rnam thar*) composed by Patrul's student, the third Dodrubchen incarnation (Rdo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, 1865-1926).<sup>48</sup> The second is a poetic hymn composed in Patrul's honor by his colleague Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo ('Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892).<sup>49</sup> The third is an expansion on the prior two compositions by Patrul's student Kunzang Palden (Kun bzang dpal ldan, 1862-

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<sup>48</sup> Rdo grub chen, "Bdud rtsi'i zil thigs."

<sup>49</sup> This work can be found imbedded in Kunzang Palden's biography of Patrul, as well as in Khyentse Wangpo's collected works. See Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 175-182, where Kun bzang dpal ldan lists its title as *Dpal sprul rin po cher tshe rabs rjes 'dzin bstod smon bkra shis birwa'i ljon bzang kun tu dga' ba'i tshal*; Mkhjen brtse'i dbang po, "Bstod tshogs gsol 'debs," 401-402.

1943),<sup>50</sup> a work which was included in the block-printing of Patrul's collected works at Dzogchen monastery (*Rdzogs chen ru dam o rgyan bsam gtan chos gling*), sometime after Patrul's death.<sup>51</sup>

Later versions of Patrul's biography, up to the present day, feature the same basic outline of Patrul's life as given in Dodrubchen's biography and in Kunzang Palden's expansion. Descriptions of Patrul's reincarnation status, of his education, and of major events in his life appear in the same order, with passages often lifted directly from these earlier biographies. Later sketches include those that appear in the history of Dzogchen monastery, in Nyoshul Khenpo's Nyingma history, in Tulku Thondup's history of the *Longchen Nyingthig* (*klong chen snying thig*) practice lineage, and in the condensed biography of Patrul by Alak Zenkar Rinpoche that is featured in the first volume of recent editions of Patrul's collected works.<sup>52</sup> Khyentse Wangpo's hymn and the statements in praise of Patrul's qualities that appear at the end of Dodrubchen's biography provide the blueprint for subsequent categorizations of Patrul's personality and teaching style.

One additional helpful source is the prose table of contents to Patrul's collected works that was composed by his one-time student Mipham Gyatso ('Ju mi pham Rnam

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<sup>50</sup> Kunzang Palden is also known as Kunga Palden (Kun dga' dpal ldan). I use the name Kunzang Palden since this is the name that he affixes to his biography of Patrul. In fact, Patrul had two distinct students with similar names. Khenchen Kunzang Palden Chodrak (Mkhan chen Kun bzang dpal ldan Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa) is the author of the biography in question. Born in the same region of Kham as Patrul (Rdza chu kha), Kunzang Palden served as his attendant. Kunzang Palden later passed on Patrul's textual interpretations and oral instructions to his own students when he became the first abbot of a monastic college at Katok monastery (Kaḥ thog rdo rje ldan in Dpal yul). See Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 477-78. Patrul apparently also had a different student named Derge Lama Kunga Palden (Sde dge bla ma Kun dga' dpal ldan). Ibid., 487.

<sup>51</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud." On the assembly and printing of the collected works, see Mi pham, "Bzhugs byang," 4-5.

<sup>52</sup> Bstan 'dzin kun bzang, *Rdzogs chen chos 'byung*; Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*; Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*; A lags gzan dkar, "Rnam thar mdor bsdu."

rgyal rgya mtsho, 1846-1912).<sup>53</sup> It provides us with a map of Patrul's compositions—organizing them into thematic categories. While Mipham's categorizations are somewhat arbitrary,<sup>54</sup> they nonetheless help to illuminate patterns of interest in Patrul's output. Mipham's text also serves as compelling documentation of the intellectual challenge that faces Tibetan scholars who endeavor to make sense of great authors' diverse oeuvre.

Stories about Patrul's life also abound. Some appear in biographies of Patrul and his students, such as in Tulku Thondup's history. There are likewise any number of oral stories about Patrul that circulate amongst his followers, often filling out episodes only briefly alluded to in the biographical record. Some of these have appeared in English publications, such as in Gene Smith's articles and in Surya Das's book of stories of Tibetan masters.<sup>55</sup> While these anecdotes are not necessarily trustworthy historical accounts, they nonetheless help us to understand Patrul's legacy as a model teacher and practitioner amongst contemporary Tibetan (and Western) Buddhists.

The historical veracity of the biographical archive at large, particularly the anecdotal stories from Patrul's life, should be subject to some critical suspicion. But they do sufficiently provide us with basic information about who Patrul knew, where and what he studied, and whom and where he taught.

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<sup>53</sup> Mi pham, "Bzhugs byang."

<sup>54</sup> For example, Mipham splits Patrul's advice compositions into two separate categories: *gtam tshogs* (miscellaneous advice) and *zhal gdams* ('face' advice). The former are subsumed under the category of *snyan dngags* (poetic writing) because, according to Mipham, they demonstrate high literary quality. The latter are parsed as tantric practice instructions, tailored to the needs of specific students. In fact, the short works listed under *zhal gdams* do not always give tantric practice instructions. My justification for treating *gtams tshogs* and *zhal gdams* together follows later in this chapter. For Mipham on Patrul's *gtam tshogs* and *zhal gdams*, see Mipham, "Bzhugs byang," 8-9, 21-25.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 246; "A Thief is Converted," "The Oral Teachings of the Primordial Buddha," "Silver is Poison," "Holy Hair Relics," "A Young Woman's Offering," "Patrul Rinpoche's Woman," "Rain of Flowers," "The King of Ghosts," "Patrul's Past Lives," and others in Das, *Snow Lion's Turquoise Mane*.

Using these various sources, I will offer an analytical reading Patrul's career, focusing on his negotiation of the variety of social positions available to him. Rather than attempting a thorough narrative reconstruction of his life, I will instead investigate the ways in which Patrul's career decisions fit into a larger field of possibilities. As will become clear in chapters 2-5, this schematic approach to Patrul's career will help to bring into focus some of the themes that emerge from my interpretation of his advice compositions.

My strategy will be to use these biographical documents, along with the record of what Patrul wrote and some pertinent statements found within his writings, to establish the different models available to him for how to lead the life of a Buddhist teacher. Patrul's choices—his decisions on where to live, who to teach, what to teach, what to write, and what issues to address in his writings—can then be related to these different models. Rather than plotting Patrul at any one single point within (the virtual map of) the Tibetan social field, I will argue that the historical record reveals a picture of Patrul experimenting with many of the different possibilities available to him.

## **A Multifform Career**

Patrul was born in 1808 in the Getse Dzachuka (*dge rtse rdza chu kha*) region of northern Kham (*kham*s), a nomadic area north of the regional center of Derge (*sde dge*).<sup>56</sup> At an early age, Patrul was recognized as an incarnation of the first Palge lama, Samten Puntso (Dpal dge'i bla ma Bsam gtan phun tshogs, d. 1807), from whom he gets

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<sup>56</sup> Patrul was born in the male-earth-dragon year of the fourteenth *rab 'byung*. His father was from the Mukpo clan (*smug po gdong*) in Upper Getse and was named Gyatog Lhawang (*Rgyal tog lha dbang*); his mother was named Drolma (*Sgrol ma*). Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 189.

the name “Patrul,” short for “Palge Trulku” (meaning the Palge incarnation).<sup>57</sup> Samten Puntso had been a local lama in Dzachuka who had founded a monastery and had overseen the building of a pilgrimage attraction—a long wall made of stones with the *maṇi* (the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion) inscribed on them.<sup>58</sup> As Samten Puntso’s incarnation, Patrul inherited the guarantee of a religious education and the eventual responsibility for his predecessor’s property—the Palge Labrang (*dpal dge bla brang*).<sup>59</sup>

Around the age of twenty, however, Patrul closed his residence at Samten Puntso’s monastic property and renounced his material rights as an incarnate lama, instead choosing to live the life of a wandering student, teacher and hermit.<sup>60</sup> The young lama’s decision to abandon his inherited position is but one example of Patrul’s seeming discomfort with the life within a monastery and his distaste for religious status positions. These themes recur in his writings, where he denigrates the value of high social status, calls out his fellow monks for their lack of authentic spiritual

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<sup>57</sup> Dola Jigme Kelzang (Rdo bla 'Jigs med skal bzang, d.u.) recognized Patrul as the incarnation of Samten Puntso. Some sources specify that Patrul was actually the third Palge incarnation, though the second incarnation did not live for very long. Jigme Kalzang was a close disciple of influential Nyingma figures of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Kham. He had been a student of the third Dzogchen incarnate lama, Ati Tenpai Gyaltsen (A ti bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1759-1792), the spiritual leader of nearby Dzogchen monastery, for example. The first Dodrupchen, Jigme Trinle Ozer (Rdo grub chen 'Jigs med phrin las 'od zer, 1745-1821) confirmed the recognition and gave Patrul the *dharma* name Orgyen Jigme Choki Wangbo. See Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 190; Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 223.

<sup>58</sup> On Samten Puntso, see Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 186-188.

<sup>59</sup> Patrul was later considered by many to be the speech emanation of Jigme Lingpa ('Jigs med gling pa, 1729/30-1798). See Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 185. In his biographical hymn to Patrul, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo also alludes to Patrul being an incarnation of Śāntideva (7th century), the Indian *siddha* Shabari, and Aro Yeshe Jungne (A ro ye shes 'byung gnas, 13th century), and to his being an emanation of Dukngal Rangdrol (Sdug bsngal rang grol), a form of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. See Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 223.

<sup>60</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 195-196. Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 202.

accomplishment, critiques their misuse of rituals, claims that they, like many in this degenerate age, are dishonest, and mocks their conservative teaching methods.<sup>61</sup>

It is too simple to conclude, however, that Patrul was anti-monastic. To the contrary, Patrul, himself a monk, had lifelong relationships with some of the most important Nyingma monasteries and monastic leaders in the Derge region. Having freed himself from his responsibilities as the Palge incarnation, around the year 1828, Patrul traveled south to study the *sūtras*, *tantras*, and secular sciences with some of the most prominent Nyingma intellectuals of the time, many of whom were affiliated with Dzogchen monastery.<sup>62</sup> Patrul received his monk's ordination from Khenpo Sengtrug Pema Tashi (Mkhan po seng phrug Padma bkra shis, d.u.) of Dzogchen monastery. This seems to have happened sometime after Patrul left the Palge Labrang, though there is no date listed for this event in the biographical literature.<sup>63</sup>

Patrul eventually began to teach at monasteries surrounding Derge—at Katok Dorje Den (*Kaḥ tog rdo rje ldan*) and at Dzogchen's Śrī Seng monastic college, where he held the position of abbot (*Shrī seng chos grwa mkhan rabs*).<sup>64</sup> He likewise taught at the

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<sup>61</sup> See Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 195-196; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, 275, 278-9; Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 353-354; For Patrul's critique of the teaching methods of monastic elites, see his *Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*, studied in chapter 4, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

<sup>62</sup> He studied Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Longchenpa's *Trilogy on Comfort and Ease* (*Ngal gso skor gsum*), and the *Guhyagarbhatantra*—all of which he would himself later teach with great frequency—from Dola Jigme Kelzang, Jigme Ngotsar ('Jigs med ngo mtshar, b. 1730), and Gyalse Shenpen Thaye (Rgyal sras Gzhan phan mtha' yas, 1800-1855). He also received *Nyingtik* instructions from Shenpen Thaye and the fourth Dzogchen incarnation, Mingyur Namkai Dorje (Rdzogs chen Mi 'gyur nam mkha'i rdo rje, 1793-1870). Around this time, Patrul also studied the secular sciences, including traveling to study grammar with the eminent grammarian Shechen Ōntrul (Zhe chen dbon sprul Mthu stobs rnam rgyal, b. 1787). Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 192, 196.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>64</sup> Patrul was the fifth abbot of Śrī Seng. At Śrī Seng Patrul taught the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, and the *Abhidharmakośa* amongst other things, and he assembled analytical outlines of canonical treatises meant for use in scholastic study. At Śrī Seng and elsewhere, he commonly instructed students on *Guhyagarbha* using Longchenpa's *Chogchu Munsel* commentary (*Phyogs bcu'i mun sel*), and repeatedly taught Longchenpa's *Trilogy on Comfort and Ease*, Jigme



Dodrupchens' monastery of Yarlung Pemakö (*yar lung padma bkod*), at Dzamtang ('*Dzam thang*), and at many other lesser monasteries throughout Kham.<sup>65</sup> Towards the end of his life, he even assumed the administrative responsibilities for Dzogchen monastery, after the death of his one-time teacher Mingyur Namkai Dorje.<sup>66</sup> Patrul thereby spent significant time in his life studying at, teaching in, and even running monasteries.

Patrul also benefited from the economic support of the monastic infrastructure in Kham. During his early life, he spent many years meditating in retreat caves surrounding Nyingma monasteries, particularly Dzogchen.<sup>67</sup> Patrul regularly received invitations from monasteries throughout Kham to visit and teach, thus providing him with places to stay and food to eat. In his final years, Patrul spent the majority of his time living at Dza Gyalgon (*rdza rgyal dgon*), the home monastery of his root teacher, Jigme Gyalwe Nyugu, where his devoted students attended to him.<sup>68</sup> Patrul's status as an incarnate lama, with connections to institutionally-affiliated Nyingma elite and their monasteries, afforded Patrul a lifelong safety-net.

Still, the life of the institutionally connected monk is only one facet of Patrul's career. The image of Patrul as a social-renunciant and wanderer that is propagated by

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Lingpa's *Yontan Dzo* (*Yon tan mdzod*), Ngari Panchen's (*Mnga' ri paṇ chen Pad ma dbang rgyal*, 1487-1542) *Ascertaining the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rnam nges*), and the inner yoga and personal instructions for the *Longchen Nyingtik*. See Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 203; Bstan 'dzin kun bzang, *Rdzogs chen chos 'byung*, 406.

<sup>65</sup> See A lags gzan dkar, "Rnam thar mdor bsdu," 302-303. Patrul served as a teaching assistant to Shenpen Thaye at Yarlung Pemakö before taking over the instructions himself, most likely in the 1850's. See Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 203.

<sup>66</sup> Patrul and Khenpo Pema Vajra (Khen po Padma ba dzra) assumed the dharmic and secular duties (*bstan srid*) for the Dzogchen seat after the death of their friend and colleague the fourth Dzogchen incarnation, Mingyur Namkai Dorje in 1870. See Bstan 'dzin kun bzang, *Rdzogs chen chos 'byung*, 412-413.

<sup>67</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 196.

<sup>68</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 205. That Patrul was supported by attendants is clear from the accounts of his illness and death. Patrul died on the 18th day of Saga (the fourth month) of the fire-pig year of the fifteenth *rab 'byung* (1887) in the presence of his doctor and two attendants, with his funeral overseen by his attendant Gemang Ōn Rinpoche (Dge mang dbon rin po che, O rgyan bstan 'dzin nor bu, b. 1851) the founder of the monastic college at Gemang Monastery.

his biographical corpus is not entirely inaccurate. Patrul devoted extensive time to living the life of a hermit monk, living nearly a decade of his life as a hermit in the Do (*rdo*) and Ser (*qser*) valleys with his heart disciple Lungtok Tenpe Nyima (Lung rtogs bstan pa'i nyi ma, b. 1830), for example.<sup>69</sup>

Patrul also spent much of his time traveling through Northern Kham's nomadic regions. His biographers credit him with spreading the practices of chanting the *maṇi* and praying for rebirth in a pure-land to those nomads and villagers that he met during his trips through Dza, Do, Golog, and Serta. These sources also claim that Patrul succeeded at curbing the practice of offering meat to lamas, limiting hunting and curtailing banditry in these areas.<sup>70</sup>

Some accounts of Patrul's life seem to interpret his decision to travel widely, without an entourage, as a manifestation of his humbleness and desire to eschew the life of fame. In one story, for example, when he stays with a family upon a visit to their nomadic community, much is made of the fact that Patrul does not let on in the slightest that he is a famous lama. Meanwhile, a lesser lama comes to their encampment amidst much pageantry. When the lesser lama, Minyak Kunzang Sonam (Mi nyag Kun bzang bsod nams, 1823-1905), recognizes his teacher Patrul in the audience, he is utterly ashamed at his own pomposity and begins to follow Patrul's modest lifestyle.<sup>71</sup> We cannot be sure that such stories are accurate, or whether they exclusively serve a hagiographic function—cementing in narrative form Patrul's

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<sup>69</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 160.

<sup>70</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197-8, 202, 207. For Patrul teaching about the treatment of animals and criticizing the practice of offering meat to lamas, see Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 202-209; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, 324-339.

<sup>71</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 209-210.

reputation as a humble monk. But they do, in the least, offer evidence that Patrul spent significant time wandering as a solitary teacher amongst nomadic communities.

True to the characterization of Patrul as a humble monk, resistant to the life of a celebrity lama, Patrul rarely gave empowerments or conducted public ritual ceremonies, a marked contrast to some of his famous peers like Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Kongtrul Lodro Thaye.<sup>72</sup> Patrul's life advice compositions are also littered with warnings about pursuing a life of success and fame.<sup>73</sup> Still, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4, Patrul's compositions do not all necessarily read as the work of a humble teacher. The role of Patrul's humility in his public persona is a complex matter.

Patrul's youthful renunciation of his status as the Palge incarnation is likewise multifaceted. Later in life he returned to his home region to teach members of the local community. He also went to great efforts to rebuild the Dobum Chenmo (*rdo 'bum chen mo*)—the wall made of *maṇi* stones that his predecessor the first Palge incarnation, Samten Puntso, had built. In so doing, he embraced the role of fundraiser and community leader.<sup>74</sup>

Patrul biographies and writings thus paint the picture of a complex individual. Patrul was a well-connected and well-educated incarnate lama, who spent stretches of his life studying, teaching, and living in monasteries. Patrul was at other times a hermit, rejecting the comforts of a home monastery in favor of practicing in solitude (or with a few close students), or wandering amongst the lower classes of Tibetan society. Patrul's writings also speak to his skepticism about the benefit of living the life

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<sup>72</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 209.

<sup>73</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 195-196.

<sup>74</sup> The biographical record speaks of how popular a pilgrimage destination the *maṇi* wall became in Patrul's lifetime, surely bringing some financial benefit to those caring for the site. See Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 209-210.

of a monastically bound monk.<sup>75</sup> In order to understand the possibilities out of which Patrul negotiated a life for himself, it will help to look at the models in his life for how to live as a Buddhist teacher.

### Patrul's Models & Teachers

Patrul's root guru was a hermit from Dzachuka named Jigme Gyalwe Nyugu ('Jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu, 1765-1842). Gyalwe Nyugu was a close disciple of the influential Nyingma treasure-revealer Jigme Lingpa ('Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer, 1729/30-1798) and one of the two primary lineage-holders of Jigme Lingpa's *Longchen Nyingtik* practice cycle. During Patrul's formative years with his guru in their common home-region of Dza, Patrul is said to have heard Gyalwe Nyugu deliver oral instructions on the preliminary practices for the *Longchen Nyingtik* no less than twenty five times.<sup>76</sup> Patrul later wrote down these counsels while in retreat in the Yamantaka cave above Dzogchen monastery, organizing them into a gradual path instruction.<sup>77</sup> This work was his beloved (and perhaps most famous work) *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (*Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*), a down-to-earth explanation of foundational Buddhist practices, from choosing a proper teacher, to generating the motivation to practice, to performing elaborate self-purification rituals.<sup>78</sup>

Contemporary Tibetan historians now identify Patrul as one of the two most important transmitters of the *Longchen Nyingtik* practice tradition in the nineteenth

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<sup>75</sup> See *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* (*Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*), treated in detail in chapter 4. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 342-350; For another example, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 275.

<sup>76</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 192.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>78</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7.

century.<sup>79</sup> Considering Patrul's relationship with Jigme Lingpa's disciple Gyalwe Nyugu and his role in promoting the *Longchen Nyingtik*, it should come as no great surprise that Patrul was commonly considered to be the speech emanation of Jigme Lingpa.

Gyalwe Nyugu, as a mentor to Patrul, would have introduced to him the ideal of living life as a hermit yogin. Nyugu, who spent twenty-one years in solitary retreat, was known as “the retreat Lama.”<sup>80</sup> As he did for Patrul, Nyugu gave frequent instruction to those who visited him on the preliminary practices for the *Longchen Nyingtik*.<sup>81</sup> Gyalwe Nyugu thereby embodies the character that appears in the advice composition that we will study in chapter 3, the solitary sage who gives teachings to those who visit him. In this way, the hermit monk is one model for how to lead the life of a Buddhist teacher that was influential for Patrul.

While Gyalwe Nyugu was Patrul's root guru, Patrul actually received his monk's ordination from Khenpo Sengtrug Pema Tashi of Dzogchen monastery, and studied there with a series of scholar monks including Gyalse Shenpen Thaye (Rgyal sras Gzhan phan mtha' yas, 1800-1855), Mingyur Namkai Dorje (Rdzogs chen Mi 'gyur nam mkha'i rdo rje, 1793-1870), and the grammarian Shechen Önrul (Zhe chen dbon sprul Mthu stobs rnam rgyal, b. 1787).<sup>82</sup> Shenpen Thaye, who founded Śrī Seng monastic college in 1848, represents another model for Patrul: the ideal of educated Nyingma monk as scholastic instructor—a teacher dedicated to providing younger monks with a formal, scholastic education.

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<sup>79</sup> Nyoshul Khenpo, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 224. According to Nyoshul Khenpo, the second major transmitter of Patrul's generation was Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, who also received *Nyingthig* instructions from Jigme Gyalwe Nyugu.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 196.

Patrul would follow his teachers' lead by working at Śrī Seng, acting as the fifth abbot of the college.<sup>83</sup> He also assembled analytical outlines of canonical treatises meant for use in scholastic study while there, further evidence of his commitment to participating in the scholastic education of Nyingmapa students.<sup>84</sup> These scholar monks, dedicated as they were to textual study, to the Tibetan secular sciences, and most importantly to giving younger monks a rigorous, scholastic training based on Indian *sāstras*, represent a second influential model for Patrul.

Patrul also had a formative relationship with Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje (Mdo mkhyen brtse 'Jigs med ye shes rdo rjes, 1800-1866), a famed yogi known for his propensity for hunting and eating meat.<sup>85</sup> Do Khyentse was an interesting match for Patrul, given Patrul's attitude towards animals, famously documented in moving passages from *Words of My Perfect Teacher* about the suffering of a sheep on the way to the slaughterhouse.<sup>86</sup> During his travels amongst nomads, Patrul apparently made efforts to curb the practice of offering meat to lamas and to limit hunting, as well.<sup>87</sup>

One compelling story well captures the perceived tension between Patrul's ethic of compassion towards animals and Do Khyentse's iconoclasm. One day Patrul and the second Dodrubchen visited Do Khyentse. When Do Khyentse served mutton to his

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<sup>83</sup> There he taught the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, *Mūlamadyamakakārikās*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, and the *Abhidharmakośa* amongst other things. At Śrī Seng, Gemang, and elsewhere, he commonly instructed students on *Guhyagarbha* using Longchenpa's *Chogchu Munsel* commentary (*phyogs bcu'i mun sel*), and repeatedly taught Longchenpa's *Trilogy on Comfort and Ease*, Jigme Lingpa's *Treasury of Qualities* (*yon tan mdzod*), Ngari Panchen's *Ascertaining the Three Vows* (*Sdom gsum rnam nges*), and the inner yoga and personal instructions for the *Longchen Nyingtik*. Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 198, 203.

<sup>84</sup> He composed outlines on the *Uttaratantra* (*Ratnagotravibhāṅga*), *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, *Abhidharmakośa*, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, and *Ascertaining the Three Vows*, all of which can be found in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Do Khyentse, like Patrul, was considered to be an emanation of Jigme Lingpa. Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 396; Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 202-3; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, 324ff.

<sup>87</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197-8, 202.

guests, Patrul's disciples become very concerned, knowing of their master's vegetarianism. When the meal had ended, they confronted Patrul about eating meat with Do Khyentse. Patrul laughed at their worry, pointing out that by eating the mutton, he, Do Khyentse, and Dodrubchen had secured a good karmic connection for the sheep in future rebirths (a typical explanation for the seemingly unethical activity of tantric *siddhas*).<sup>88</sup>

Do Khyentse played an important role in Patrul's life. He is credited with being the teacher from whom Patrul was introduced to the nature of mind—essentially meaning that Do Khyentse introduced Patrul to his own enlightened nature. The story of this encounter, which appears in Kunzang Palden's biography, is as follows. One day, Patrul met Do Khyentse outside of his tent. The hunter-yogi grabbed Patrul by the hair and tossed him to the ground. Patrul, smelling alcohol on Do Khyentse's breath, thought to himself that the master was surely acting as he was due to the harmful influence of alcohol.<sup>89</sup> Do Khyentse, sensing Patrul's silent judgment, scolded him, calling Patrul an “Old Dog,” spitting on him, and showing him his pinky finger in disgust before walking away. Patrul instantly realized his own mistake, recognizing that Do Khyentse had in fact given him a powerful instruction meant to lead him to an unmediated experience of the nature of mind.<sup>90</sup> Patrul straightened his posture and immediately experienced a direct realization of unhindered awareness. While Patrul

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<sup>88</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 212.

<sup>89</sup> Patrul actually composed a short work on the dangers of alcohol. See his *Myos byed btung ba'i nyes dmigs* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 1-44.

<sup>90</sup> For Patrul's own instructions on inducing unmediated experience of the nature of mind, see his *Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King* (*Mkhas pa shrī rgyal po'i khyad chos*)—a brief but reputedly profound instruction on generating and stabilizing the realization of the nature of one's mind, based on the Tsigsum Nedek (*Tshig gsum gnad brdeg*s) ascribed to Garab Dorje (Dga' rab rdo rje). Dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 5. For a translation, see Reynolds, *Golden Letters*.

had been introduced before to the nature of mind by his root guru Gyalwe Nyugu, Patrul's full-blown awakening to unobstructed awareness (*zang thal gyi rig pa*) only came at this moment. In memory of this seminal event in his life, Patrul, in typically humble fashion, often referred to himself as "Old Dog" (*khyi rgan*), broadcasting to everyone how significant this encounter with Do Khyentse had been for him.<sup>91</sup>

We must acknowledge that these stories are potentially apocryphal and feature common Buddhist tropes about the interactions between enlightened masters and their students. This second story calls to mind Marpa's violent treatment of Milarepa, for example.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, Do Khyentse's reputation for drinking alcohol and generally behaving in unpredictable ways is manifest in the episodes. The tales thereby highlight the way in which Do Khyentse, at least the caricatured persona of Do Khyentse, represents a specific model of Buddhist activity recognized by Tibetans: the Buddhist teacher as *siddha*.

Patrul was himself known to play the role of iconoclast, on occasion, like his teacher Do Khyentse. One story recounts how a pair of monks found him meditating outside of a cave. When they asked him for his lineage affiliation, he skillfully evaded their question. Finally, when they asked him for his secret name (*gsang mtshan*), hoping that his tantric name would give away his affiliation, he responded by exposing himself—playing on the double meaning of the Tibetan term "*gsang mtshan*," which literally means "secret name," but is also a euphemism for "penis."<sup>93</sup> This story does not provide uncontested historical evidence that Patrul regularly acted as an

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<sup>91</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 193-4.

<sup>92</sup> Tsangnyön Heruka, *Life of Milarepa*, 63. The Do Khyentse-Patrul story would also make for an interesting comparison with the stories of enlightened interactions between masters and disciples portrayed in Ch'an *kung 'an* literature.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 246.



iconoclast. Still, given the numerous accounts of Patrul behaving in unexpected ways, we can reasonably speculate that he was, in fact, influenced by the ideal of the Buddhist master as eccentric. Do Khyentse, as a manifestation of this Tibetan “crazy wisdom” tradition, thus constitutes a third model for Patrul on how to act as a Buddhist teacher.<sup>94</sup>

Patrul’s intimate connections with Nyingma teachers of various kinds thus exposed him to a variety of role models for how to live the life of an educated, religious teacher: the hermit teacher model embodied by Gyalwe Nyugu, the scholastic instructor embodied by Shenpen Thaye, and the nonconformist *siddha*, embodied by Do Khyentse.

Patrul also inherited models via different means—through the stories about and writings of past Tibetan masters. Certain such figures appear prominently in his writings, particularly in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. One set of such models are Milarepa (Rje btsun Mi la ras pa, 1052-1135) and the early Kagyupa (*bka' brgyud pa*)—accomplished meditators who spent time in retreat in the wilderness, but likewise taught all people with whom they came into contact.<sup>95</sup> A second set of historical models is the early Kadampas (*bka' gdams pa*), including figures like Atiśa (Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century), Dromtonpa ('Brom ston Rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas, 1004-1064) and Geshe Potowa (Dge bshes po to ba Rin chen gsal, 1027-1105)—whose sayings appear throughout *Words of My Perfect Teacher*.<sup>96</sup>

Patrul’s frequent reference to the Kadampas speaks to their status as examples for him. In particular, their preaching of renunciation, a life of simplicity (often in

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<sup>94</sup> For more on the “crazy wisdom” tradition, see DiValerio, “Subversive Sainthood.”

<sup>95</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 36, 43, 50, 56, 208, and so on.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 55, 58, 96, 200, 210, 227, and elsewhere.

seclusion), and an emphasis on *bodhicitta* practice seem to have been poignant for Patrul. The ideas of renunciation, simplicity, and *bodhicitta* practice appear time and again in his life-advice writings.<sup>97</sup> The Kadampas are thereby both models for Patrul's life as a practitioner and teacher, and are sources for certain attitudes towards practicing dharma (the emphasis on renunciation, simplicity and *bodhicitta*) that permeate his advice compositions.

### Patrul, In Contrast

Not all possibilities for the Buddhist life necessarily served as examples for Patrul. In fact, some of his most well known contemporaries seem to have lived quite differently from Patrul.<sup>98</sup> As mentioned, in contrast with contemporaries like Kongtrul Lodro Thaye and Khyentse Wangpo, Patrul rarely gave empowerments or conducted public ritual ceremonies.<sup>99</sup> Kongtrul and Khyentse also famously devoted themselves to gathering together teachings and empowerments that were in danger of being lost. Their massive treasure (*gter ma*) and oral instruction (*gdams ngag*) collections preserved a plethora of practices, placing value on maintaining the rich diversity of Buddhist (and even Bön) practices for their contemporaries and for posterity.<sup>100</sup> Kongtrul and

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<sup>97</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, 275-6, 277, 288, 311, 314, 317, etc.

<sup>98</sup> For more on the religious activities of Patrul's contemporaries in Eastern Tibet, see Gardner, "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams." For broader historical studies of the region, see Gardner, "Khams pa Histories"; Tsomu, "Local Aspirations and National Constraints"; Hartley, "Socio-Historical Study of the Kingdom of Sde-Dge."

<sup>99</sup> Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation*, 209. Patrul did, at times in his life, give annual teachings to larger groups of disciples, such as his annual instructions on Guhyagarbha at Gemang Monastery and his annual teachings of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* at Dza Gyalgon (Rdza rgyal dgon) monastery. It does not seem, however, that he often gave tantric empowerments. For his annual teachings, see Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 226; Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 207.

<sup>100</sup> See Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 235-268; Ringu Tulku, *Ri-Me Philosophy*, 22-39; Barron, *Autobiography of Jamgön Kongtrul*, 515-549.

Khyentse's approach to teaching seems to be one concerned with quantity: the gathering together and spreading of as many teachings as possible.

Patrul, in contrast, took a very different approach to teaching—as manifest in his teaching record as well as in his writings. Patrul taught the same few texts over and over again to different audiences, most notably Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*,<sup>101</sup> Karma Chagme's (Gnas mdo Karma chags med, 1613-1678) *Dechen Monlam* (*Bde chen smon lam*), the *Maṇi Kambum* (*Maṇi bka' 'bum*), and the chanting of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable mantra (*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*).<sup>102</sup> Rather than concerning himself with gathering together more and more teachings, with empowering large groups of followers to practice esoteric teachings, or even with creating new practice cycles through visionary treasure discovery (*gter ma*), Patrul chose to teach the same (often basic) teachings over and over again. For Patrul, a few texts and topics were enough for a lifetime of teaching.

This preference for teaching a few, potent teachings is clearly manifest in Patrul's writings, as well. As we will discuss later in this chapter, Patrul repeatedly exclaims the importance of delivering only the most important, essential teachings. His texts also commonly bemoan the impossibility of practicing all of the available disciplines.<sup>103</sup> To practice one is to practice them all, he claims.<sup>104</sup>

A note about Patrul and non-sectarianism is in order. Contemporary English descriptions of Patrul are quick to (problematically) identify Patrul as a member of the

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<sup>101</sup> To name but one consequential example, Patrul spent five days teaching Mipham the ninth chapter on wisdom from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, teachings which Mipham credits for shaping his famous and controversial commentary on the chapter. Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 228; Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 871. For other examples of his teaching the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, see Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197, 203, 205-7.

<sup>102</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197, 200-202.

<sup>103</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 275; *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 132.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 132.

nineteenth-century non-sectarian movement (*ris med*) in Eastern Tibet.<sup>105</sup> Patrul was, in fact, a close colleague of two of the three figures most frequently associated with this “movement.” Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo composed a hymn in honor of Patrul and Chogyur Lingpa (Mchog gyur gling pa, 1829-1870) gave Patrul the responsibility of overseeing the distribution of one of his treasure revelations.<sup>106</sup> There is, to my knowledge, however, no evidence in the biographical archive that Patrul had a relationship with Kongtrul (’Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas, 1813-1899). Kongtrul does not appear in Patrul’s biographies, nor does Patrul appear in Kongtrul’s autobiography.

I personally see no compelling reason to place Patrul within a *ris med* “movement,” if one wants to call Kongtrul, Khyentse Wangpo, and Chogyur Lingpa’s activities, as significant as they were, a movement. With that said, Kun bzang dpal ldan uses the phrase “*ris med*” a number of times to describe Patrul’s activity, which was, by all accounts, non-sectarian in so far as he taught students from all different lineages and used source materials from all different lineages.<sup>107</sup> One might justifiably understand *Ris med* to be, *de facto*, an informal lineage formed by spiritual descendents of Kongtrul and Khyentse, those who trace their lineage through Kongtrul and Khyentse’s students and incarnations. In so far as members of such an informal lineage emphasize a non-sectarian attitude in the construction of their self-identity as a

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, xxxviii; Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, 297. For examples of scholars describing *ris med* as a nineteenth-century movement, see Samuels, *Civilized Shamans*; and Davidson, “Tibet,” 857. For a thorough critique of the way in which scholars and popular translators have misread Gene Smith’s “Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement” and spread overly generalized (and thereby meaningless) ideas about such a “movement,” see Gardner, “Twenty-Five Sites,” chapter 3.

<sup>106</sup> For Patrul’s connection to Chogyur Lingpa, see Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi’i bum bcud,” 204.

<sup>107</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi’i bum bcud,” 193, 206, 208.

lineage, it makes perfect sense for them to include Patrul in their accounts of the “origin” of the *ris med* lineage.

Regardless of the status of *ris med* as either a lineage or a movement, it is clear that Patrul’s life does not fit into any simple story about ecumenical religious activity in nineteenth-century Kham. Patrul’s career, to the contrary, is far more complex, blending as it did a variety of ways of enacting the life of a public Buddhist figure.

### **Patrul the Teacher, Patrul the Composer**

In fact, I would suggest that a study of his career uncovers Patrul’s continued experimentation with different roles. He was an incarnate lama who rejected his monastic inheritance, yet eventually returned to embrace his predecessor’s legacy. He was a scholastically trained monk and later a scholastic instructor and the abbot of a monastic college who nonetheless wrote frequently of his skepticism of a monastic life devoted to scholastic study and composition.<sup>108</sup> He was a friend and consoler to the elite in Derge,<sup>109</sup> yet simultaneously a populist teacher to nomads and villagers throughout Khams. He was both a forest-dwelling hermit and an administrator at a major monastery, a self-effacing renunciant and an iconoclastic performer. Patrul’s career was a never-ending negotiation of a network of competing social positions.

When we look at his writings, we can see such experimentation more clearly.

We will explore this in detail with respect to the texts analyzed in the following

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<sup>108</sup> *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*, the subject of chapter 4, captures well Patrul’s ambivalence towards a monastic career. See “Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad” in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung ’bum* 2003, vol. 1. For articulations of related sentiments elsewhere in his advice writings, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung ’bum* 2003, vol. 8, 275, 278-9.

<sup>109</sup> Patrul gave personalized teachings to political figures and community leaders. He famously composed his *Drama in a Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*) narrative as advice for a heartbroken aristocrat in Derge whose wife had died. Patrul’s students also included a governor of Derge named Palden Chime Takpai Dorje and a general of the Central Tibetan forces stationed in Derge. Nyoshul Khenpo, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 227.

chapters, but we can also perceive it in his oeuvre, at large. Patrul's works speak to a continued experimentation with compositional form, especially in his writings about the Buddhist path in its various permutations.

Patrul's collected works, in six volumes, was assembled by his disciple and attendant Gemang Ön Rinpoche and published and edited under the auspices of Khenpo Shenga (Mkhan po gzhan dga' Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba, 1871-1927) at Dzogchen monastery.<sup>110</sup> The great proliferation of compositions in Patrul's collected works about the graduated path to liberation (*lam rim*) speaks to his unfailing dedication to coming up with different ways to communicate the same material. As we know from his biographies, Patrul taught the same material over and over throughout his life to audiences of vastly different educational backgrounds. He famously taught Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to everyone whom he met, and regularly taught Karma Chagme's *Dechen Monlam* (*Bde chen smon lam*) prayer for rebirth in *Sukhāvatī*, the *Maṇi Kambum* (*Maṇi bka' 'bum*), and the chanting of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable mantra.<sup>111</sup> I suggest that Patrul's entire literary career shows itself to be a continual experimentation with different literary forms and modes of rhetoric in service of delivering skillful teachings to diverse audiences—personal disciples, scholar-monks, aristocrats and government officials, nomads and villagers—about the path to liberation.

Patrul wrote a handful of commentaries on Indian and Tibetan renditions of the path, parsing the words that appear in the treatises and summarizing their overarching meanings. Patrul's second largest composition next to *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, for

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<sup>110</sup> On the process of its assembly, see Mi pham, "Bzhugs byang," 4-5.

<sup>111</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197, 200-203, 205-7.

example, is a massive commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*,<sup>112</sup> one of the most important sources for Indian and Tibetan conceptions of the *bodhisattva* path. Patrul actually wrote two commentaries to this text, in addition to an analytical outline. He also wrote a short commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, another Sanskrit composition attributed to Asaṅga that addresses the *bodhisattva* path.<sup>113</sup> Patrul was also interested in Tibetan renditions of the path, particularly those from his Nyingma lineage. So, for example, Patrul wrote a short explication of Longchenpa's (Klong chen rab 'byams pa, 1308-1364) *Comfort and Ease in the Nature of the Mind* (*sems nyid ngal gso*), which is itself a rendition of the path. Patrul also wrote a series of commentaries on Jigme Lingpa's *Treasury of Qualities* (*Yon tan mdzod*), an influential Tibetan articulation of the path written in the late eighteenth century.<sup>114</sup>

Patrul's collected works likewise contain a host of analytical outlines of Tibetan texts concerned with the path. These outlines, which lay out in an ordered fashion the topics covered in important treatises, most likely grew out of Patrul's teaching responsibilities at monasteries around Khams, in particular his short residence as an instructor at the Dzogchen Śrī Seng (*Rdzogs chen śrī seng*) monastic college. The relationship between Patrul's teaching responsibilities and his outline-production is

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<sup>112</sup> Said to be based on Tsong Khapa's *Legs bshad phreng ba*, per Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 203. Patrul's commentary is (simply) entitled *Sher phyin mngon rtogs rgyan gyi spyi don*. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 6. For a translation and study see Brunnholzl, trans., *Groundless Paths*.

<sup>113</sup> Patrul's commentary purports to capture the "condensed meaning" of the *śāstra*. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the trope of "condensed meaning" is ubiquitous in Patrul's writings. See *Mdo sde rgyan gyi don bsdus 'phags pa'i dgongs rgyan*, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 256-277.

<sup>114</sup> On the *Trilogy on Comfort and Ease*, see *Sems nyid ngal gso'i bsdus don padma dkar po'i zil mngar* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 1-53. On the *Treasury of Qualities*, see *Yon tan mdzod kyi 'chad thabs yid kyi me long*; *Yon tan mdzod kyi spyi don dang sa bcad rgyas bsdus bcas*; and *Yon tan mdzod kyi bsdus don me tog phreng ba* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 2, 308-424.

relatively clear given the similarity between the lists of texts that he taught at Dzogchen and the outlines found in his collected works.<sup>115</sup>

Once again, many of Patrul's outlines concern path-related texts, including the aforementioned *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Trilogy on Comfort and Ease* and *Treasury of Qualities*. Patrul's construction of these analytical outlines exemplifies his attempt to write about the path for a specific audience – in this case students at monastic colleges. Outlines to great Sanskrit treatises, such as those that Patrul produced, used in concert with interlinear commentaries, became standard teaching tools at Śrī Seng, as well as monastic colleges throughout Khams, in great part due to the work of Khenpo Shenga, one of Patrul's most famous successors at Śrī Seng. Analytical outlines are used as tools that enable students to gain a familiarity with the contents, structure and logic of important (and often difficult) primary sources.<sup>116</sup>

As a complement, Patrul composed freestanding investigations of the path. These include short treatments of topics ranging from monastic discipline to the stages of bodhisattva practice.<sup>117</sup> Most famously, however, he composed a long-form explanation of the path, in the Tibetan genre of *lam rim* ("graduated path"): *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (*Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*), which explains, with plentiful anecdotes,

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<sup>115</sup> As discussed earlier, Patrul prepared analytical outlines for the *Uttaratantra* (*Ratnagotravibhāṅga*), *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, *Abhidharmakośa*, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, and *Ascertaining the Three Vows*, all of which he taught at Śrī Seng. The texts can be found in *Rdza dpal sprul*, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 2; On Patrul instructing students on these texts at Śrī Seng, see Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 203.

<sup>116</sup> For a mention of Patrul's students using his outlines (before moving on to interlinear commentaries), see Dilgo Khyentse, *Brilliant Moon*, 33. For Shenga's reliance on interlinear commentaries as teaching tools, see Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 26, 232-33, 332 n. 835.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, *Bsgrub pa'i bslab bya gzhi bcu bdun bshad pa* in *Rdza dpal sprul*, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 105-112; and *Rgyal sras byang chub sems dpa'i sa lam gyi rnam grangs mdor bsdu* in vol. 4, 173-186; Translations of some of Patrul's shorter works on the path are also included in Brunnholz, trans., *Groundless Paths*.



the requisite practices for a student who wishes to engage in study and practice of the *Longchen Nyingtik*.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, Patrul composed dozens of life-advice texts (*zhal gdams*),<sup>119</sup> a great many of which offer condensed versions of the path, often emphasizing simple yet all-encompassing “essential points” of the practice, such as devoting oneself to one’s guru, generating the wish to serve others, or looking at one’s own mind. In many of his forty some odd life-advice compositions, most of which are in verse and fewer than four pages in length, he repeatedly teaches the same material. He offers an introductory guide to the path to enlightenment, with a focus on devotion to one’s teacher, taking refuge and generating the attitude of a bodhisattva, chanting Avalokiteśvara’s six-syllable mantra, and repeatedly examining the nature of one’s mind no matter the context. It is here that we see most fully that not only was Patrul consumed with the issue of the path, but he also was preoccupied with the challenge of how to present the path in a rhetorically skillful manner to his varied audiences. Patrul’s life-advice works exemplify his perpetual experimentation with structure and rhetoric.

Patrul generated a wide variety of compositions from limited subject matter by changing his tone and meter, and by employing witty schemes to capture the attention of his audience. So, for example, Patrul’s famous *Drama in a Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*) is a narrative consisting of dharma instructions to a bee who is overcome with

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<sup>118</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7.

<sup>119</sup> Patrul’s collected works contain over forty *zhal gdams*, a great many of which offer condensed versions of the path, often emphasizing simple yet all-encompassing “essential points” of the practice. See the many *zhal gdams* that follow the *Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 140-173, as well as those gathered together under the title *Mtshungs don man ngag rdo rje'i thol glu spros bral sgra dbyangs* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 260-371. For other *zhal gdams* like instructions, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1. Here, for example, is found Patrul’s famous *Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*, a drama consisting of dharma instructions to a bee who is overcome with sorrow at the loss of his lover.

sorrow at the loss of his lover.<sup>120</sup> The *Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* (*Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam dam pa'i snying nor*) is a lyrical instruction on the entirety of the path through the prism of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable mantra, a text that we will look at in detail in chapter 2.<sup>121</sup> Numerous shorter life-advice pieces also present versions of the path, whether they focus on the importance of study amongst beginners, offer a shortened version of the path emphasizing renunciation and *bodhicitta*, or lay out a more thorough path with instructions on everything from understanding karma to maintaining subtle insights into the nature of mind during post-meditation periods.<sup>122</sup>

In reflecting on Patrul's manifold life-advice instructions, I would again emphasize the experimental nature of his enterprise. Over the course of his lifetime, he continually composed new works in order to play with the proper rhetoric, structure, and tone of his instructions. I think it would be a mistake to judge the rhetorical diversity of his path instructions to be a mere reflection of the long career of a teacher who spoke to many people. The rhetorical and structural refinement of these compositions, a great many of which are in verse (in a variety of meters), tells the story of a practiced craftsman. Patrul's path instructions, in particular his advice compositions are, to my mind, *compositions* through and through—teachings whose rhetoric and delivery were carefully chosen by their author.

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<sup>120</sup> See *Lha chos dang mthun pa'i gtam padma'i tshal gyi zlos gar* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 195-247. For English translations, see Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*; and Patrul Rinpoche, *Lotus Garden's Play*.

<sup>121</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 127-140. For an English translation, see Dilgo Khyentse, *Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones*; and Patrul Rinpoche, *The Practice of the Essence of the Sublime Heart Jewel*.

<sup>122</sup> For a *zhal gdams* intended for young students, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 309. For short renditions of the path, see *Ibid.*, 314, 317. For more thorough versions see *Ibid.*, 287, 366.

To the point, one composition from his collected works confirms his fascination with the question of how to compose and deliver skillful teachings, an interest particularly manifest in his life-advice compositions. In an introduction to a short history of the dharma in Tibet that he wrote, entitled *A Short Discourse on the Origin of the Dharma* (*Chos 'byung 'bel gtam nyung ngu*),<sup>123</sup> Patrul devotes some time to discussing the principles behind different modes of public speech—whether these discourses be ones that teach worldly ethics or practices aiming at liberation; whether they be ones intended to generate feelings of wonder and devotion, or certainty about the nature of reality; whether these compositions be humorous, historical in focus, or otherwise.<sup>124</sup> The details of this discussion confirm that Patrul was exceedingly concerned with the proper ways to deliver different kinds of teaching.

In this introduction, Patrul lists various requisite elements of successful discourse. With regard to discourse concerning worldly aims and ethics, one should speak powerfully, one should incorporate a sense of humor, and one should generate certainty in one's audience about the truth.<sup>125</sup> These observations, but the first of many in this passage, display Patrul's interest in a range of performative desiderata: the quality of one's delivery (speaking powerfully), one's choice of rhetorical strategy (sense of humor), and one's goals for teaching in the first place (generating confidence or certainty in one's audience). Patrul also recognizes a connection between these performative components and the specific mode of discourse to which they apply—

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<sup>123</sup> See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1. For a contemporary commentary on this work, see Nyan shul, *Legs bshad 'phrul gyi lde'u mig*. Thanks to Jann Ronis for bringing this commentary to my attention.

<sup>124</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 290-293.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 290: *ngag gi sgrib pa spangs pa la 'byung ba shes che/ brjid la non dang ldan pa/ mshar la bzhad gad 'byin pa/ bden la nges shes bskyed pa de/ mi chos kyi phu thag chod pa la 'byung/*

here noting how these strategies are particularly relevant for discourse about worldly ethics, called “people’s dharma” (*mi chos*).

Patrul is also sensitive to the mistakes that public speakers make in their rhetoric and their performance. Egotistic, pseudo-scholars, for example, deliver discourses that, despite being filled with lots of material, have no relevance or connection to the goals of their audience, include examples that contradict the points that they are trying to make, and are burdened by many superfluous examples.<sup>126</sup> Other discursive mistakes follow in Patrul’s discussion: discourses filled with endless deception, discourses with no structure, and long talks with no practical relevance. These are all qualities that characterize what Patrul playfully calls the speech of stubborn old folks.<sup>127</sup> And if one isn’t properly learned about one’s subject matter, Patrul later remarks, one will not be able to cover enough ground in one’s talk and will be unable to answer questions about what one has spoken about.<sup>128</sup> Patrul thus displays a keen sensitivity to the preparatory, performative, rhetorical, structural, and substantive components of discourse. Patrul, it should be emphasized, is someone who spends a lot of time reflecting on how to be an effective orator and teacher.

### **What are Rhetorically-Rich Buddhist Self-Development Instructions?**

Patrul was not the first Buddhist teacher to experiment with rhetorically rich self-development instructions, by any means. In fact, once one looks for historical sources for Patrul’s work, one begins to realize how widespread such writing is in Indo-

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 290: *mang la 'brel ba med pa/ dpe dang don du 'gal ba/ dpe mang khur du lus pa de/ mi mkhas nga rgyal che ba la 'byung/*

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 290: *zob la zad dus med pa/ lus med yan lag mang ba/ 'brel med gtam gzhung ring ba de/ rgan po u tshug can la 'byung/*

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 291: *thos pa'i mtha' rgya ma bcad na/ chos bshad khol bus sa mi chod de slar la dris na yang lan mi 'byung/*

Tibetan literary history. Such works deliver instructions on how one should engage in self-development: recognizing the faults in one's everyday life and adopting new approaches that will lead to benefits, for both oneself and others, in the future. These works are often in verse, and are often directed at a specific audience member. Thus while they are likely pitched towards a wide audience, they sometimes present themselves as a teaching tailored to a specific individual. Of particular interest, however, is the way in which these forms of Buddhist teaching entail work-like aspirations. The following brief survey touches upon some of these predecessors to Patrul's work, situating his compositions within this large sphere of Buddhist advice works.

In order to specify the degree to which any of these specific works persuade their audiences imaginatively, emotionally, or otherwise, a thorough study would be required. With that said, it is clear that Patrul inherits various tropes and rhetorical mechanisms from the following works and genres. Given the literary refinement of Patrul's life-advice, which I aim to demonstrate in this dissertation, it is quite likely that some of his predecessors share an equal power to influence their audiences. Perhaps others will be inclined to explore the work-like aspects of these compositions in the future.

From one perspective, one might say that Buddhist "life-advice" begins with Śākyamuni Buddha's own discourses—at least as they came to appear in the *Sutta Nikāyas* and Sanskrit *Āgamas*. As with some of Patrul's life-advice works, the *suttas* take the form of dialogues, wherein the Buddha sometimes transmits practice instructions. The most significant overlap, perhaps, can be found in *sūtras* espousing renunciation—

the rejection of the goals and responsibilities of ordinary social existence in exchange for the pursuit of liberation. One might say that Patrul inherits from the Buddha a recognition of the importance of mobilizing strong rhetoric in order to convince his followers that their lives, as currently structured, will never give them the satisfaction that they crave. This first step of rejecting the status quo is central to Buddhist projects of self-cultivation, as articulated both in the Buddha's discourses and in Patrul's life-advice. Stylistically, Patrul's life-advice works do not much resemble *suttas* and *sūtras*, however. They are not nearly as Socratic in structure. The few life-advice works that are structured as dialogues do not include the frequent back-and-forth between teacher and interlocutor that are so common in the *sūtras*. Neither does the heavy repetition that one finds in the *sūtras* appear in Patrul's compositions. Nor, of course, does one find the *sūtra*-identifying genre conventions in Patrul's compositions. Patrul's works do not open with a description of Patrul's location and audience, as do the *sūtras*, for example.

Patrul's life-advice writings have more in common with the verses collected in the *Dhammapada* or the *Udānavarga*. Patrul was familiar with the Tibetan translation of the *Udānavarga* (or at least some of its verses), as he cites the collection in his composition *Words of My Perfect Teacher*.<sup>129</sup> Like these collections, Patrul's advice instructions are often in verse and employ witty structural manipulations of language.

As evidence of the longevity of certain rhetorical devices in Buddhist literary history, consider the following verse from the second chapter of the *Dhammapada*:

The path to the deathless is awareness,  
Unawareness, the path of death.

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<sup>129</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 41. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7, 58.

They who are aware do not die;  
They who are unaware are as dead.<sup>130</sup>

This verse draws a simple contrast between awareness and unawareness, identifying awareness with the path to liberation and unawareness to the path of death. By establishing a simple parallel between alternating lines (the first about awareness, the second unawareness, and again the third about awareness and the fourth unawareness), the verse makes an argument for the importance of awareness. Awareness, in this verse, becomes an irreplaceable skill, necessary to cultivate if one is to avoid death. The author of this verse never has to make a sustained argument about how awareness prevents death. The simple elegance of the verse and its parallel structure do the work for him.

Compare this past stanza with a set of verses from Patrul's life-advice:

If one has devotion,  
whatever one does will be blessed.  
If one does not have devotion,  
Whatever one does will be of no benefit.<sup>131</sup>

While this particular verse of Patrul's is less elegant than others, it does make use of a similar parallel structure. By placing two statements in parallel, within one stanza, Patrul avoids having to justify his claim. He does not explain why devotion leads to blessings, or why action without devotion would bring no benefit. Simply by juxtaposing these two statements, in verse, Patrul is able to make an authoritative statement. The parallel structure itself justifies the content of the statement—placing the idea (of the power of awareness in the *Dhammapada* verse, of the power of devotion in Patrul's verse) into the realm of common wisdom.

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<sup>130</sup> *Dhammapada* 2.1. See Carter and Palihawadana, trans., *Dhammapada*, 6.

<sup>131</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 285.

Patrul's life-advice compositions differ significantly from the *Dhammapada* verses, however. While Patrul's stanzas can stand alone as units, as many of the *Dhammapada* verses do, Patrul's stanzas are always part of a longer-form compositional structure. The verses in collections like the *Dhammapada*, while often gathered into chapters based on common themes, seem to be independently circulating units. In fact, the high level of variance between the different *Dhammapada*-like collections, in different languages, speaks to their independent travel.<sup>132</sup> Patrul's advice writings, by contrast, show structural development from verse to verse.

Closer in style to Patrul's advice works are two South Asian genres of ethical instruction: *nītiśāstras* (seven of which are found in the Tanjur) and *lekhas* (thirteen of which are found in the Tibetan canons).<sup>133</sup> *Nītiśāstra* compositions are treatises delivered to royalty, outlining ethical conduct befitting a king. Tibetans, modeling themselves after their Indic predecessors, continued to compose such works through Patrul's time. Patrul's student Mipham composed a well-known *nītiśāstra*, for example.<sup>134</sup> These works bear on Patrul's life-advice in so much as they lay out worldly ethical instructions. *Lekhas*, or epistles, were also often directed to kings and likewise contain ethical instructions and advice. (See Appendix II for a list of *nītiśāstra* and *lekha* in the Tibetan Tanjur).

Patrul was well familiar with both of these forms of literature. In his long-form composition *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul cites Nāgārjuna's *Letter to a Friend* (*Suhṛllekha*), Aśvaghoṣa's *Letter of Consolation* (*Śōkavinodana*), and the *Sutra of Advice to the*

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<sup>132</sup> Friedlander, "Dhammapada Traditions and Translations."

<sup>133</sup> See Michael Hanh, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 196-212 on the epistles.

<sup>134</sup> Mipham's *Rgyal po lugs kyi bstan bcos sa gzhi skyong ba'i rgyan*.



*King (Rājavavadakasūtra)*.<sup>135</sup> He likewise cites Nāgārjuna’s *Ratnāvalī*, a work delivered to a king, labeled in its Tibetan title as “advice” (*gtam*).<sup>136</sup> While Patrul’s life-advice compositions do not mark themselves (in their titles or colophons) as having been written in either of these two formal genres, his works do share thematic concerns with them. Candragomin’s *Śiṣyalekha*, for example, includes entreaties that are quite common in Patrul’s writings. He spends a number of verses extolling a life spent in retreat, and likewise emphasizes the necessity to practice now, without delay.<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps the most influential-example of an Indic persuasive, versified self-development instruction is Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This work was widely known throughout Tibetan Buddhist history.<sup>138</sup> By all accounts, it was an immense influence on Patrul. Patrul’s biographies attest to the frequency with which he gave instructions on the text, teaching it wherever he traveled, whether in residence in a monastic college or in retreat in a forest with his closest disciples.<sup>139</sup> Patrul is so closely identified with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that subsequent generations of Tibetans commonly portray him as an itinerant yogi with no worldly possessions save his ragged copy of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>140</sup> Patrul is also recognized as a reincarnation of Śāntideva, further evidence that Patrul’s contemporaries associated him with Śāntideva.<sup>141</sup>

The work is clearly influential for Patrul’s life-advice compositions. Like Śāntideva, Patrul likes to compose four-line stanzas marked by forceful rhetoric. He

<sup>135</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 34, 41, 119, 324.

<sup>136</sup> A Tibetan title for the text is *Rgyal po la gtam bya ba rin po che'i phreng ba* (The Precious Garland of Advice To the King). See Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice*.

<sup>137</sup> See, especially, verses 68-72, in Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 96-101.

<sup>138</sup> On the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in Tibet, see Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 228-9.

<sup>139</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 197, 203, 205-7; Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation*, 203-5.

<sup>140</sup> Dilgo Khyentse, *Heart Treasure*, 234.

<sup>141</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 185.

adopts any number of Śāntideva's rhetorical techniques. For example, he mirrors Śāntideva's penchant for directing his rhetoric at himself, as if giving himself, as author, a pep talk. This harsh, self-directed rhetoric figures prominently in the fourth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, wherein Śāntideva pushes himself to recognize the disastrous consequences that will follow should he fail in his vow to dedicate himself to saving all beings.<sup>142</sup>

One can interpret Śāntideva's self-directed entreaties as skillful ways of communicating with his audience that accomplish multiple ends. First, they humanize the *bodhisattva* lifestyle, making the process appear accessible to the implied audience. They give the audience an opportunity to identify with Śāntideva's struggles to live up to his enormous responsibility to serve others. The passage cited implicitly gives audience members permission to embrace Śāntideva's misgivings, while, in theory, inspiring them to overcome such anxieties. Second, Śāntideva's work gives his audience a taste of his own humility. Śāntideva is not too proud to display his own anxiety about his undertaking. This show of humility gives Śāntideva credibility as a worthy teacher.

Patrul frequently makes use of these same techniques in his life-advice compositions. In multiple different works, he addresses himself, specifically, chiding himself to put aside all distractions and practice.<sup>143</sup> Patrul's bluntness with himself can be quite startling, in fact. He talks quite frankly about the uselessness of the seemingly important tasks that keep him from serious practice of the path to liberation. As is the case with Śāntideva, Patrul's rhetoric makes a strong impact—leaving the impression of

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<sup>142</sup> Shantideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 54-55; Zhi ba lha, *Spyod pa la 'jug pa*, 15-16.

<sup>143</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 140-143.

a teacher praiseworthy because of his humility, and relatable because he struggles with the same mundane distractions that we do.

### “Life-Advice” in Tibet

Tibetan Buddhists have long made use of Indic literary technologies for self-development instruction. Consider, for example, Sakya Pandita’s *Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels* (Skt: *Subhāṣitaratnasidhi*, Tib: *Sakya legs bshad*) as an influential predecessor to Patrul’s advice works. Sapan is well known as an early exponent of Sanskrit *paṇḍit* culture, particularly with its tradition of *kāvya* high-literature. Sapan translated Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa* and wrote on the importance of the study of Sanskrit language-arts and prosody. Like Sapan, Patrul studied the *Kāvyādarśa*. He wrote a commentary on the treatise, for example, and thereby knew well the various metaphorical figures described therein.<sup>144</sup>

Sapan’s *Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels* is an exemplification of Sanskrit poetics and a possible influence on Patrul. It takes the form of 457 quatrains of similes, organized into thematic chapters.<sup>145</sup> These verses are perhaps more like the pedagogical verses of the *Dhammapada* than the other-mentioned works—while organized thematically, they do not constitute a treatise composed with beginning, middle and end. Still, these verses are well known to literate Tibetans and have an influence over subsequent literary-minded, versified compositions, like those of Patrul. One can identify resonances of the *Treasury* in Patrul’s compositions. Its opening chapter presents stanzas on the activity and attitude of “the wise.” Sakya Pandita proceeds to then list

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<sup>144</sup> See Patrul’s *Snyan ngag me long gi mngon brjod rna ba’i gling bu* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung ’bum* 2003, vol. 1, 56-102. For a study of the *Kāvyādarśa* in Tibet, see Eppling, “A Calculus of Creative Expression,” section 3.

<sup>145</sup> Bosson, trans., *Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels*.

verses about “superior people,” and “fools.” These verses resonate with one particular life-advice work of Patrul’s, which lists all of the good qualities of “good friends,” before listing the bad qualities of “bad friends.”<sup>146</sup>

As Victoria Sujata has argued, both Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa* and Sapan’s *Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels* came to influence what is usually described as an indigenous form of Tibetan composition called “songs of realization” (*mgur*). These songs are related to Indic *vajragīti* and *caryāgīti*, though she claims them to be rooted in Tibetan folksong traditions.<sup>147</sup> Sujata’s study focuses on songs composed by seventeenth-century figure Kalden Gyatso (Skal ldan rgya mtsho, 1606-1677). She categorizes approximately 30% of his major collection of songs to feature advice for others, with another 15% advice to himself.<sup>148</sup> These songs, or songs like them by Patrul’s hero Shabkar Tshogdruk Rangdrol (Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug rang grol, 1781-1851), for example, were likely literary models for Patrul.<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, Kalden Gyatso wrote a series of songs directed at animals, including bees.<sup>150</sup> These call to mind Patrul’s *Drama in the Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*)—an advice work addressed to a bee whose lover has died in a storm.<sup>151</sup>

One self-acknowledged group of models for Patrul in this regard were the early Kadampas—namely Atiśa and his successors, such as Dromtonpa, Geshe Potowa and Geshe Chekawa (Dge bshes 'chad kha pa Ye shes rdo rje, 1101-1175). Patrul makes any number of references to the activities, sayings, and practices of these figures in *Words of*

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<sup>146</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 307-9.

<sup>147</sup> Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization*, 78, 83.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>149</sup> See Sujata, trans., *Songs of Shabkar*.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-8.

<sup>151</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 195-247; Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*, 44-97.

*My Perfect Teacher*. Of particular significance for a genealogy of Patrul's life-advice are the various collections of the dialogues and instructions of the Kadampa masters, such as the twelfth-century collection by Chegom Sherab Dorje (Lce sgom Shes rab rdo rje, d.u.) entitled the *Scattered Sayings of the Kadam* (*Bka' gdams gsung bgros thor bu*), which was eventually anthologized in Yeshe Don Grub's (Ye shes don grub Bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1792-1855) nineteenth-century *Treasury of Gems* (*Legs par bshad pa bka' gdams rin po che'i gsung gi gces btus legs bshad nor bu'i bang mdzod*). This collection contains any number of ethical instructions, often in the form of prose dialogues between masters and students. It also houses short bits of advice, in four line stanzas.<sup>152</sup>

Perhaps the most relevant artifact from the Kadam sayings is a short set of instructions delivered by Atiśa to his patron, the Western Tibetan King, Lha Jangchub Ö (Lha Byang chub 'od, d.u.). This set of instructions touches upon a number of themes that are ubiquitous in Patrul's works. Atiśa emphasizes, in no uncertain terms, the importance of relying on one's teacher. He also speaks of the necessity of giving up worldly distractions by retreating to a solitary forest. Finally, he advises the King to probe his own faults, not the faults of others.<sup>153</sup> All of these instructions are common in Patrul's life-advice works.<sup>154</sup>

Atiśa and his Kadam successors also composed works in two other related genres, distinct from yet nonetheless significant for Patrul's life-advice works. The first such genre is *lam rim* (and *bstan rim*)—instructions laying out a graduated path to liberation.<sup>155</sup> Famous examples include Atiśa's *Lamp for the Path of Awakening*

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<sup>152</sup> Jinpa, ed., *Book of Kadam*.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 563-66.

<sup>154</sup> See, for example, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 282-285; 351-365; vol. 8, 129, 270.

<sup>155</sup> On the genre of *bstan rim* see Jackson, "The *bsTan rim* ("Stages of the Doctrine")."

(*Bodhipathapradīpa*), Gampopa's *Precious Garland of the Supreme Path* (*Lam mchog rin po che'i phreng ba*), and Tsong Khapa's *Great treatise on the Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim chen mo*).<sup>156</sup> Particularly formative for Patrul was Jigme Lingpa's *Treasury of Qualities*, upon which he composed three commentaries.<sup>157</sup> Patrul's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* is commonly identified as exemplifying a later *lam rim*. The *lam rim* structure that Patrul inherits from Tibetan literary history dating back to the early Kadampa (and subsequently back to Indian Mahayana theorists of the path, like Kamalāśīla in the *Bhavanakrama*) therefore plays an important role in his life-advice compositions.

Patrul's life-advice works are not themselves *lam rim*, however. They are often in verse (compared to the primarily prose *Words of My Perfect Teacher*) and are far shorter. Neither do they feature anecdotes and stories, which figure prominently in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. While Patrul's life-advice works do not read like *lam rim* compositions, they do entail a less formal presentation of the various successive steps that one should take in progressing towards liberation. Many of them would not have been possible were it not for the *lam rim* structure popularized by Atiśa and his successors.

Kadampa *blo sbyong*, or mind-training compositions, are a closer fit as a comparison point for Patrul's works. These terse, versified texts are short versions of the path, transmitted in a more intimate, if cryptic, fashion than the longer graduated path compositions. Influential versions of such mind-training works include Chekawa Yeshe Dorje's *Seven Point Mind Training* (*Blo sbyong don bdun ma*), and the *Eight Verses of*

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<sup>156</sup> Gampopa (Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079-1153), Tsong Khapa (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419). For translations of these works see Atiśa, *A Lamp for the Path*; Gampopa, *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*; Tsong-Kha-pa, *The Great Treatise*.

<sup>157</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 2, 308-424.

*Langri Thangpa* (*Glang thang pa'i tshig brgyad ma*). The latter is cited in *Words of My Perfect Teacher* in the context of a story about an exchange between Geshe Chekawa and Geshe Chakshingwa.<sup>158</sup> While these works are too laconic to be understood without commentary (unlike Patrul's life-advice works), they model the form of an intimate transmission of path-related self-cultivation instructions.

The proximity of mind-training instructions (*blo sbyong*) and life-advice (*zhal gdams*) is evidenced by a contemporary Tibetan anthology that presents exemplary instantiations of both of these loose categories (both genre labels are listed in the title of the work). In actuality, this collection includes works with a wide variety of genre labels, including mind-training compositions (*blo sbyong*), epistles (*sprin yig*), last will and testament (*zhal chems*), oral instructions (*gdams ngag*), pith instructions (*man ngag*), and heart advice (*snying gtam*).<sup>159</sup> Out of the thirty-three works anthologized here, three are by Patrul, further proving Patrul's reputation as a masterful composer of advice works.<sup>160</sup>

Within the vast field of Buddhist advice genres, *zhal gdams* are perhaps closest to, if still distinct from, the categories of "oral instructions" (*gdams ngag*) and "pith instructions" (*man ngag*). As Matthew Kapstein has argued, these two genre labels pick out instructions "in connection with meditational and yogic practice."<sup>161</sup> While the terms can be used interchangeably, *man ngag* "seem often to connote a higher degree of

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<sup>158</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 227.

<sup>159</sup> Blo gros rgyal mtshan, ed., *Blo sbyong dang zhal gdams*.

<sup>160</sup> For an outline of the contents of this collection, see <http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W1KG1789>, last visited April 11, 2012. Patrul's contributions are entitled: *Kun bzang chos rgyal la gdams pa*; *Dus gnad dang mthun pa'i mgur*; and *Rang nyid gcig pu*.

<sup>161</sup> Kapstein, "gDams ngag," 275.

esotericism,” than *gdams ngag*.<sup>162</sup> Kapstein argues that such works, in particular *gdams ngag*, are best understood as products of the interrelationship between masters and students.<sup>163</sup> They are thus intimate instructions, meant for disciples who seek to use these works as guides for practice.

There is evidence for the overlap between the categories of *gdams ngag* and *zhal gdams*, further proving the looseness, in practice, of Tibetan genre-labels. The great ten-volume nineteenth-century collection of oral instructions (*gdams ngag*) entitled the *Treasure of Oral Instructions* (*Gdams ngag mdzod*), assembled by Patrul’s contemporary Kongtrul Lodro Thaye, gathers together practice instructions from eight distinct self-cultivation lineages.<sup>164</sup> This massive anthology includes works technically labeled as *zhal gdams*, however, such as Padampa Sangye’s (*Pha dam pa sangs rgyas*, 11<sup>th</sup> century) *Eighty Verses for Those From Dingri* (*Ding ri brgyad cu pa*).<sup>165</sup> One could not categorize Padampa Sangye’s advice as meditation or yogic practice instructions. The verses read more like an assembly of inspirational ethical aphorisms. While there is obvious slippage in the application of the categories of *mang ngag*, *gdams ngag*, and *zhal gdams* to diverse instructions of masters to their disciples, we would do well to avoid mistakenly equating the instantiations of these categories, one with the other. Ultimately, accurate analysis of Tibetan *man ngag*, *gdams ngag*, and *zhal gdams* can only be done on a case-by-case basis.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> For an outline of the work see Barron, *Autobiography of Jamgön Kongtrul*, 517–520. For the text, see 'Jam mgon kong sprul, ed., *Gdams ngag rin po che'i mdzod*.

<sup>165</sup> The *Ding ri bryad cu pa* appears in volume 13 of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*, in the *zhi byed* section. Its full title in the edition is *Mgur zhal gdams ding ri brgyad cu pa*. See *Pha dam pa sang rgyas*, *Ding ri brgyad cu pa*.



## Actual *Zhal gdams*

There are any number of Tibetan compositions that actually carry the *zhal gdams* label in their title. While somewhat imprecise as a genre label, the term *zhal gdams* picks out an important kind of discursive activity: instructional advice bestowed upon students (monks or laity) by their masters. Scholars of Tibetan literature have linked the loose genres of *bslab bya* (instructions on “what one should learn”) to *zhal gdams*, as an equivalent genre label, as well the genres of *gsal 'debs* (reminding instructions), *gzhen skul* (exhortation to remember), *dran skul* (encouraging reminder), and *'doms pa* (counsel).<sup>166</sup> Tibetan *zhal gdams* and *bslab bya* are far too numerous to present in any detail. There are some notable examples, however, which foreshadow significant features of Patrul’s life advice.

One of the earliest would seem to be Padampa Sangye’s aforementioned advice to his disciples living in Dingri, which sometimes is called Padampa Sangye’s *zhal gdams* (*Pha dam pa sangs rgyas kyi zhal gdams ding ri brgya rtsa ma*). Padampa Sangye was an eleventh-century Indian sage credited with founding both the *zhi byed* and *chod* practice lineages in Tibet. His verses have, quite literally, become part of the popular discourse in Tibet. The composition, if one can call it that, is really a collection (or variant collections) of verses. In fact, different recensions of the *The Hundred Verses For Those From Dingri* differ significantly one from the other.<sup>167</sup>

Patrul, it turns out, borrows a few different rhetorical figures from these well-known verses. For example, compare the following stanzas:

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<sup>166</sup> Go shul grags pa, *Bod kyi rtsom lugs*, 130.

<sup>167</sup> Martin, “A New History for the Ding-ri-ba Verses.” Note, for example, that the aforementioned version of the verses that appears in the *Gdams ngag mdzod* is actually a shorter version, in eighty verses.

Padampa Sangye, *Eighty Verses of For Those From Dingri*:

Grasp the ultimate object—the homeland of the primordial state.  
It does not change, oh people of Dingri.  
Enjoy the ultimate wealth—the great treasure of the nature of mind.  
It is never used up, oh people of Dingri  
Taste the ultimate food—the supreme flavor of meditative absorption.  
The affliction of hunger is cut-off.<sup>168</sup>

Patrul Rinpoche, *Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End*:

Subdue the enemy—anger—  
with the weapon of love.  
Sustain your friends and companions—the beings of the six realms—  
with the method of compassion.  
Plough the field—devotion—  
for the crop of experience and realization.<sup>169</sup>

In these similar rhetorical figures, we find Padampa Sangye and Patrul using worldly metaphors to give their audience instructions about applying Buddhist teachings. In the place of valued worldly items such as one's homeland, wealth, food, and crops, we get dharma items, such as the primordial state of the mind, the nature of the mind, meditative absorption, meditative experience and realization. In the place of valued activities such as subduing one's enemies, sustaining one's friends, and working one's fields, we get the dharma-activities of countering anger with love, acting out of compassion towards all beings, and developing devotion.

Another influential, early *zhal gdams* is Zurchung Sherab Drakpa's (Zur chung Shes rab grags pa, 1014-1074) *Eighty Chapters of Advice* (*Zur chung zhal gdams brgyad cu*).<sup>170</sup>

The challenging composition actually presents itself as the last will and testament of

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<sup>168</sup> Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, "Ding ri brgyad cu pa," 34: yul gyi dam pa gnyug ma'i gtan yul zungs/ de la 'pho 'gyur med do ding ri ba/ nor gyi dam pa sams nyid gter chen spyod/ de la zad pa med do ding ri ba/ zas kyi dam pa ting 'dzin ro mchog myong/ bkres ba'i gdung pa chod do ding ri ba/

<sup>169</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 132: zhe sdang dgra bo byams pa'i mtshon gyis thul/ rigs drug gnyen 'khor snying rje'i thabs kyis skyongs/ dad pa'i zhing la nyams rtogs lo tog rmos/

<sup>170</sup> Dilgo Khyentse, *Zurchungpa's Testament*. Dilgo Khyentse's decision to teach the work to his students and the subsequent publication of his commentary speak to the enduring influence of the work.

Zurchungpa, delivered to his students on his deathbed. This work is far more difficult than Padampa Sangye's collection—it presents exoteric and esoteric instructions, often coded in metaphors and oblique references impenetrable without a learned commentary. In this way, Zurchungpa's advice does not read much like that of Patrul's. Still, one does notice some similarities. Zurchungpa's work is structured around enumerations of phenomena: six faults in not having faith, thirteen instructions to be put into practice, five things that are true, and so on. Patrul often structures his life-advice around such enumerations. For example, his *Reminder to Son Śrī* (*Bu shrī'i yid lan ges rgyu*) is made up entirely of important sets of three—three things not to forget, three things to which you should pay no attention, three kinds of people whom you should not praise, and so on.<sup>171</sup> Zurchungpa is ultimately most concerned with his students working to recognize the nature of their own minds—an advanced practice within the Nyingma Dzogchen tradition. This emphasis on becoming familiar with the nature of one's own mind is perhaps the most ubiquitous theme in Patrul's life-advice compositions.

Perhaps the most famous Tibetan *zhal gdams* or *bslab bya* composition is the *Wood & Water Metaphors* (*Chu shing gi bstan bcos*) by Gungtang Tenpe Gronme (Gungthang Dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762-1823). This work is identified as a particularly important example of the genre in the twentieth-century study of Tibetan literary forms entitled *Bod kyi rtsom lugs rnam bshad*.<sup>172</sup>

A few other of Patrul's predecessors composed large collections of *zhal gdams* worthy of note. Karma Chagme, an influential figure for Patrul, has a collection of *zhal*

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<sup>171</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 150-152.

<sup>172</sup> Go shul, *Bod kyi rtsom lugs*, 130.

*gdams* of immense size.<sup>173</sup> Karma Chagme was an important model for Patrul, as Patrul chose to spread his prayer for rebirth in *Sukhāvatī* far and wide in Eastern Tibet, particularly in his travels amongst nomads.<sup>174</sup> Karma Chagme's interest in popular practices may well have served as a model for Patrul.<sup>175</sup>

Another predecessor of note was Patrul's teacher Gyalse Shenpen Thaye. Shenpen Thaye taught Patrul during Patrul's youthful studies at Dzogchen monastery. The two also taught together at Yarlung Pemakö, with Patrul serving as his teacher's assistant before taking over the reins in subsequent years. Shenpen Thaye also composed a large number of life-advice works, some of which he may well have delivered in the presence of Patrul.<sup>176</sup>

### **An Introduction to Patrul's Advice Compositions: *zhal gdams* as *gnad***

First and foremost, Patrul's life-advice works (*zhal gdams*) are practice instructions. The majority of them are in verse and are quite short. More often than not they amount to less than four pages in length, with the longest being seventeen pages long and the shortest less than half a page (seventeen lines) long.<sup>177</sup>

Mipham Rinpoche, in his prose survey of the contents of Patrul's collected works, categorizes these life-advice compositions as practice instructions specifically

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<sup>173</sup> Karma chags med, *Ri chos mtshams kyi zhal gdams*.

<sup>174</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 197, 206.

<sup>175</sup> Per personal communication with Gene Smith.

<sup>176</sup> See Gzhan phan mtha' yas, "Legs bshad nor bu'i bang mdzod."

<sup>177</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 272-288 and vol. 8, 307. These compositions appear in the first volume and the final volume of Patrul's collected works, respectively. Patrul's collected works were assembled by his disciple and attendant Gemang Öñ Rinpoche (Dge mang dbon rin po che O rgyan bstan 'dzin nor bu, b. 1851) and published under the auspices of Kenpo Shenga (Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba, 1871-1927) at Dzogchen monastery. In my research, I have worked with three editions of the collected works, listed in the bibliography. Subsequent references will be to the edition published in Chengdu, in eight volumes, in 2003.

tailored to the needs of particular students.<sup>178</sup> Consistent with these observations, a few of Patrul's life-advice works are explicitly directed to a specific student or group of students, who are identified either in the introduction or colophon to the given work.<sup>179</sup>

We can identify some common themes within Patrul's life-advice works. Patrul returns time and again to common exhortations. One should despair at the degenerate morality of one's peers, whose activities are crooked (*'khyog po*) and deceitful. Given the widespread immorality of these times, one should reflect on the futility of all goals within the social sphere. Still, one should act in an honest or straightforward (*drang po*) manner. Moreover, if one truly wants to help oneself, one should abandon all social ties and pursue the Buddhist path to liberation in a solitary cave.<sup>180</sup>

Patrul's life-advice compositions emphasize a variety of practices, yet they often come back to the same procedures. They repeatedly extol the importance of generating devotion to one's guru and building confidence in his teachings. Patrul's life-advice works often rehearse a summary of the path to liberation, with an emphasis

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<sup>178</sup> Mi pham, *Bzhugs byang*, 21: *skal bzang slob ma'i tshogs la rang skal dang mtshams par gdams pa'i man ngag zhal gdams sna tshogs kyi skor*

<sup>179</sup> *The Drama in a Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*) was composed for an aristocrat named Khra shi dge legs. Acharya Nyima Tsering explores the context for the production of this composition in Patrul Rinpoche, *The Lotus Garden's Play*, and explains that Khra shi dge legs became Patrul's disciple after his wife (the daughter of Ju-Tsang Gonpo Dhargye) died in an epidemic. The text appears in *Rdza dpal sprul, Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1. Patrul delivered his instructions on the danger of alcohol to the King of Derge, Gzhan phan lhag pa'i thugs ldan gyi dam pa. *Myos byed kyi btung ba'i nyes dmigs*, *Ibid.*, vol 8, 1-44. He also wrote another *zhal gdams* directed to a king—Rgyal 'phags dgon du kun bzang chos rgyal. *Ibid.*, 152-156. His *zhal gdams* on good and bad friends that begins "*grogz bzang po'i kun spyod 'di ltar 'go*," was given to Bla ma rig 'dzin rgya mtsho. *Ibid.*, 307-309. His *zhal gdams* beginning "*rtag tu rgyal ba kun dang sems can gyi*" is written for Lhun grub rjo rje. *Ibid.*, 156-165. Patrul composed a short *zhal gdams* in mixed verse and prose for Go 'gyo bla ma padma rdo rje, *Ibid.* 359-361. While in retreat, Patrul composed the *zhal gdams* beginning "*shing mchog dam pa nye gro nga yi drung du*" for 'Bya bam do sngags, in order to cheer him up (*skyo ba sangs pa'i ched du*). *Ibid.*, 269-275. While at Śrī Seng, Patrul wrote a short (prose) *zhal gdams* explicitly designed for beginners (*thos pa chung*). Its opening line suggests that it is for young students from Gyarong (lords of Gyarong): *shar rgyal mo rong ba gar dbang sogs thos pa chung zhing chos la mos pa yod pa rnams kyi lag len gyi gnad*. *Ibid.*, 317-320. The *zhal gdams* called *Reminder to Son Śrī* (*Bu shrī'i yid la nges rgyu*) is directed to "Son Śrī," who could be anyone, but perhaps was a young disciple. *Ibid.* 150-152. Likewise, his *zhal gdams* that begins "*rgyal ba kun gyi ye shes gcig bsdus pa*" is written for a close student, as is evident from the refrain "Oh heart-son (*snying gi bu*)."*Ibid.* 366-371.

<sup>180</sup> See *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 127-130 for but one example of these themes.

on the early steps of taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating the compassionate attitude of *bodhicitta*. Patrul's instructions often culminate in entreaties to discipline one's own mind, analyze one's own mind, or look directly at one's own mind.<sup>181</sup>

Among these common practice instructions and ethical exhortations, a curious *leitmotif* appears: that of the singular practice. The singular or essential practice is one that encapsulates all others, or supersedes all others. Yet the exercise or the instruction that Patrul identifies as a singular, essential practice is not always the same. At times, this supposedly singular practice even changes from one page of a composition to the next.

Patrul uses a series of related terms to refer to singular practices. One ubiquitous example is the word *gnad*, which roughly denotes an “essential or key point” of a teaching. In one representative instance, Patrul commends the power of a meditation practice that can realize the “essential point of the mind” (*sems kyi gnad*).<sup>182</sup> Such a realization is the culmination of the meditative program of “looking at one's mind” (*sems la lta ba*); a form of meditation that Patrul describes often in his advice works in the simplest of terms.

In this instance, Patrul directs his students to observe the workings of their minds by way of mindful attention when in crowds and when alone, when eating, lying down, going somewhere, walking, or when sitting. They are to observe their minds while maintaining a balanced attitude towards the very practice itself, neither fixating on having a definitive purpose in one's “looking” nor abandoning purpose altogether.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 152-3, 155, 158, 160, 161, 163, 164, 169, 287-9, 311, 314, 317, 319, 366-371, and so on.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 277: *sems la blta ba goms pa na/ sems kyi gnad gsang shes 'gyur te/*

Patrul's students are to maintain concentrated "looking" without interfering with their minds, by allowing thoughts to arise uninhibited yet avoid getting distracted by the thoughts.<sup>183</sup> The "essential point" is something that one can understand only through the application a singular (if challenging) practice of continual, and disciplined observation of one's mind.

As Patrul elaborates on the benefits of this realization, it becomes clear why he considers it to be an "essential point" (*gnad*). "When one meditates looking at the mind, one will know the secret essential point of the mind," Patrul explains. "If one knows the secret essential point of the mind, one knows the very nature of all phenomena."<sup>184</sup> If one can, through disciplined meditation, come to understand the true nature of one's mind, then one will have likewise understood this self-same nature of all phenomena in the world.

As this latter statement implies, an essential point (*gnad*) is a secret key. It is something that, if known or achieved, can unlock the door to further accomplishments. In this case, disciplined observation of one's own mind gets you remarkably far. It brings you knowledge of the nature of all phenomena. In fact, as Patrul later states, knowing the nature of mind is itself "what is known as" enlightenment.<sup>185</sup> So an essential point, a *gnad*, is something singularly powerful that emerges from a single (if challenging) practice. It is a secret key, a password of sorts. In this example, it is nothing less than the secret to gaining liberation.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 276-277.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 277: *sems la blta ba goms pa na/ sems kyi gnad gsang shes 'gyur te/ sems kyi gnad gsang shes gyur na/ chos rnams kun gyi de nyid shes/*

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 277: *sems kyi rang bzhin 'di lags te/ ... shes na mya ngan 'das zhes bya/*

<sup>186</sup> There is nothing new to the idea that a repeated, disciplined encounter with the nature of mind is the key practice for getting enlightened, of course. Such instructions are common in the Dzogchen tradition.

Patrul's appeal to an essential point of practice is hardly restricted to discussions of the nature of mind. In one life-advice work that Patrul composed for a group of beginners when he was teaching at Śrī Seng monastic college at Dzogchen monastery, he announces his intent to explain the essential point of practice.<sup>187</sup> After discussing faith in one's guru and the necessity of renunciation, Patrul explicitly identifies taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating the compassionate attitude of *bodhicitta* as the essential points of practice.<sup>188</sup> As these first few examples show, there is in fact no single essential point for Patrul. Refuge, *bodhicitta* practice, and identifying the nature of mind are all, at times, identified as essential points of practice. The “essential point” is thus a *topos*, a trope of sorts, a preferred rhetorical figure that emerges in different guises again and again in Patrul's life-advice works. In Patrul's hands, this *topos* functions as a rhetorical device.

Patrul's fascination with singular, essential points of practice extends beyond those moments where the term “essential point” (*gnad*) appears. Patrul employs any number of phrases in order to communicate the singular importance of a given instruction. He often refers to the essence (*ngo bo*)<sup>189</sup> of Buddhist teachings, or the fundamental root (*rtsa ba*)<sup>190</sup> of the teachings. At times, he also calls attention to important phenomena by identifying them as singular (*gcig po*).<sup>191</sup>

Patrul likewise employs verbal constructions to show that certain essential ideas or practices encapsulate others. To this end, Patrul will often use the verbs *'bsdus*

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Nor is the idea of “*gnad*” unique to Patrul. The function of the *topos* of the singularly essential practice will prove to be its own “key” to understanding how Patrul's life-advice compositions work, however.

<sup>187</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 317: *lag len kyi gnad*.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 319: *'di gnyis nyams su len tshul gnad*.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 279, for example.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 316.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 277.



*pa* and *'dus pa*—to gather together multiple things or to condense multiple items into a single one.<sup>192</sup> Patrul also speaks often of how multiple items or practices are contained (*tshang ba*),<sup>193</sup> or wrapped up and concentrated (*'dril ba*),<sup>194</sup> in one singular item or practice. Finally, Patrul will sometimes claim that beyond a single, essential practice, there is nothing else (of import) (*de las med*).<sup>195</sup>

One moment in Patrul's advice works best captures the intimate connection between Patrul's interest in essential points of practice and his predilection for composing life-advice. Towards the end of an advice composition directed to a close disciple, Patrul announces that the instructions he has been giving have been authentic life-advice teachings (*zhal gdams*). Despite the faults of their author (Patrul himself), they are still trustworthy because they have been passed down to Patrul by a lineage-holding guru (*brgyud ldan bla ma*).<sup>196</sup> Patrul is applying a self-deprecating rhetorical figure, one that appears time and again in his life-advice compositions (as well as in writings by Tibetan authors broadly). Patrul establishes his own humility by belittling himself while reinforcing the authenticity of the instructions by pointing out their origin in his guru's lineage.

Patrul's next line reasserts the “essential point” trope. Patrul's life-advice instructions, being authentic *zhal gdams* from his own guru, constitute “the essential point of the entire extent of all pith instructions (*man ngag*).”<sup>197</sup> Pith instructions, or *man ngag*, are practice instructions, usually esoteric in nature, transmitted from teacher

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 162.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 277.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 316.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>196</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 370.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 370: *man ngag tshad kyi gnad*.

to student. The term “pith instruction” (*man ngag*) carries with it a certain cache, implying the transmission of important, even secret teachings. “Pith instructions” also gives the name to the scriptural collection of the most advanced Dzogchen teachings (*man ngag sde*).<sup>198</sup>

Patrul’s life-advice instructions, he claims, transmit the most essential points of practice (*gnad*) of all of these pith instructions. His instructions constitute, to repeat, “the essential point of the entire extent of all pith instructions.” Patrul’s instructions, he implies, gather together into one place the most essential points from the myriad teachings that appear in all the many pith instructions. If pith instructions are essential teachings, then Patrul’s life-advice writings are the essence of the essence. If pith instructions are the refined, intimate instructions that a guru passes to his disciples, then Patrul’s life-advice are the refined of the refined.

Patrul further identifies his life-advice instructions as “heart-drop” (*snying thig*) teachings.<sup>199</sup> Heart-drop teachings comprise another set of highly valued, esoteric, elaborate Nyingma practice instructions. Beyond naming a series of influential treasure revelations, the term heart-drop teaching (*snying thig*) is also applied to the highest of three sections of the pith instruction scriptural collection (*man ngag sde*). If the pith instructions are the highest of the Dzogchen teachings, themselves the most advanced of all the Buddhist teachings according to the Nyingma nine-vehicle scheme, then the heart-drop instructions are the highest of the high. By identifying his life-advice teachings (*zhal gdams*) as heart-drop instructions, Patrul is arguing that they are the most important teachings amongst all of the most important teachings. Seeing as

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<sup>198</sup> As in the trio of *sems sde*, *klong sde*, *man ngag sde*.

<sup>199</sup> On *snying thig* literature, see van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection*, 9.

his life-advice works are substantively different from heart-drop teachings, it is clear that Patrul's statement is rhetorical.

The image of a "heart-drop" also captures the spirit of Patrul's "essential point" rhetoric. The term heart (*snying*) implies an essence, as in our English idiom "the heart of the matter." *Thig*, short for *thig le*, means a "drop," and is the term for semen. Within tantric subtle-body yoga, these "drops" carry subtle mental energy throughout the channels of the body. A *thig le* is yet another Indo-Tibetan image for an essence—something within which powerful energy is concentrated. So a "heart-drop," (*snying thig*), is itself a way of saying "essential-essence." It is a term that picks out the most concentrated, potent and therefore indispensable kernel of something.

By describing his life-advice (*zhal gdams*) as the essential point (*gnad*) of all pith instructions (*man ngag*) and as heart-drop (*snying thig*) instructions, Patrul points towards their essential potency in two ways, simultaneously. First, he establishes their status as the highest of the highest teachings, gesturing towards their equivalence to the heart-drop category of the pith instruction section of the Dzogchen scriptures. Second, he layers images of condensed, singular, essential potency one on top of the other. Life advice instructions communicate the essential points of practice (*gnad*) that are condensed from the entire extent (*tshad*) of the already powerful pith instruction teachings (*man ngag*). They are thereby the potent, essential drop (*thig le*) of the heart-essence (*thig le*).

This statement is but one example of Patrul employing the rhetoric of the singular, essential point. In this case, Patrul's rhetoric serves to motivate his disciple, instilling confidence in the power and import of the teachings that he has just received.

But the rhetoric here employed also reflects Patrul's attitude towards his own practice of composing and delivering life-advice instructions. For Patrul, such teachings are opportunities to communicate only the most essential, significant points of practice. Patrul's self-declared goal in composing these instructions is to transmit the most important of the most important practices, to explain the most essential of the essential, the most potent of the potent. While the content of Patrul's life-advice teachings change and the specific practices that he extols differ from work to work, Patrul's intent to transmit singularly essential teachings is relatively consistent, as the ubiquity of his "singular, essential" rhetoric attests to.

#### **Source Materials: Four *zhal gdams***

In addressing questions about the rhetoric of Patrul's ethical instructions, I will pay particular attention to four compositions. These compositions, all of which contain verse, are classified in two related categories of *zhal gdams* and *gtam tshogs*, which I will collectively call "life-advice." The term *zhal gdams* literally translate to "face teaching," or "mouth teaching," though the term connotes advice of some kind. *Gtam tshogs* literally translates as "collection of talk," roughly meaning "miscellaneous discourses," or even "miscellaneous reports."

The Tibetan term *gdams* of *zhal gdams* is the past form of the verbal root '*doms pa*, meaning to teach, instruct, or explain. The *zhal* of *zhal gdams*, which means "face," implies an intimacy between the speaker (teacher) and receiver (student) of the discourse. This is consistent with Mipham's categorization of Patrul's *zhal gdams* as practice instructions specifically tailored to the needs of particular students.<sup>200</sup> *Zhal*

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<sup>200</sup> Mi pham, "Bzhugs byang," 21.

*gdams* are, in this interpretation, compositions with the intent of instructing a specific audience in cultivation practices. Building upon the personal intimacy implied by *zhal gdams*, any number of Tibetan scholars and translators have chosen to render *zhal gdams* as “advice.”<sup>201</sup> The personal intimacy implied by the English word “advice” well-captures the sense of *zhal gdams* as personalized instructions or counsel.

The term *gtam* of *gtam tshogs* signifies speech of some kind, while *tshogs* refers to a group of things that have something in common. The term *gtam* is commonly found in conjunction with a second term, for example *lkog gtam* (secret talk), *kha gtam* (oral legend), *khengs gtam* (arrogant talk), and so on. As a compound, however, *gtam tshogs* can refer, specifically, to ethical advice. As the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* explains, *gtam tshogs* refer to collections of instructions, versified or otherwise, that counsel specific audiences in ethics (“what to accept and what to reject.”). These instructions are directed, as appropriate, to specific audiences, whether those audiences are made up of aristocrats and their ministers, monks and religious figures, or common citizens.<sup>202</sup>

“What to accept and what to reject,” is a common Buddhist phrase signifying proper activity. The phrase appears in Patrul’s writings both in reference to what he calls worldly ethics (“people’s dharma,” *mi chos*) and to Buddhist ethics (“divine dharma,” *lha chos*). Worldly ethics, for Patrul, are instructions about how one should treat others, with particular sensitivity to their social position. Patrul’s instructions on worldly ethics commonly emphasize the importance of honesty in one’s dealings with

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<sup>201</sup> See Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*, 5; Dilgo Khyentse and Padampa Sangye, *Hundred Verses of Advice*; Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice*; cf. Garry, trans., *Wisdom Nectar*, 27, where the translator renders *zhal gdams* as “heart advice.”

<sup>202</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1040; Go shul grags pa, *Bod kyi rtsom lugs*, 158, makes a similar argument.

others. Buddhist ethics, in contrast, concern activities that lead one to overcome suffering, to become liberated.<sup>203</sup>

In conclusion, while *gtam tshogs* can in theory refer to any broad collection of miscellaneous discourse, in practice it connotes collections of ethical advice—whether soteriologically oriented or not. This characterization of *gtam tshogs* as ethically oriented instructions holds for the term’s meaning in general, as articulated in Tibetan dictionaries and genre studies.<sup>204</sup> It likewise works in reference to the instantiations of *gtam tshogs* in Patrul’s collected works.

Why batch together the two loose genre labels of “face-advice” (*zhal gdams*) and “miscellaneous advice” (*gtam tshogs*)? Why call them “life-advice?” In the case of Patrul’s writings, the division of compositions into these two categories is a somewhat arbitrary one. According to Mipham Rinpoche, Patrul left innumerable instructions with students and followers around Eastern Tibet over the course of his life.<sup>205</sup> Patrul’s student Gemang Ön Rinpoche, following Patrul’s death, oversaw the energy-consuming project of collecting these many works.<sup>206</sup> In preparation for the block-printing of Patrul’s collected works at Dzogchen monastery, someone, whether Mipham, Ön Rinpoche, or perhaps Khenpo Shenga, would have had to arrange the texts in order.

The compositions in question were placed in one of two of the volumes of the collected

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<sup>203</sup> Such a distinction appears in Patrul’s *Discourse of an Outcast Sage* (*Gdol pa’i drang srong gi gtam*), analyzed at length in chapter 3. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung ’bum* 2003, vol. 1. This rendition of two interrelated paths mimics the one laid out at the outset of Nāgārjuna’s *Ratnāvalī*. There, Nāgārjuna introduces the pursuit of *dharma* that leads to high status (Skt: *dharmābhyudaya*, Tib: *mngon par mtho ba’i chos*), which is comparable to Patrul’s worldly *dharma* (that leads to better rebirths), and the pursuit of certain happiness (Skt: *naiśreyasa*, Tib: *nges par legs pa*), which is comparable to Patrul’s divine *dharma* (that leads to liberation). In Patrul’s advice, instructions on *mi chos* and *lha chos* often appear in the same work. His *Discourse of an Outcast Sage* is such an example. For instructions pertaining exclusively to worldly ethics, see his *Gzhon nu blo ldan gyi dris lan*, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung ’bum* 2003, vol. 1, 31–55.

<sup>204</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*; Go shul grags pa, *Bod kyi rtsom lugs*.

<sup>205</sup> Mipham, “Bzhugs byang,” 4.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

works. Some are present in the first volume, where one finds compositions of particular literary note. That is to say, as Mipham explains, these works all display Patrul's skillful application of literary aesthetics, as formalized in the *Kāvyaadarśa*.<sup>207</sup> Here appear those "life-advice" works labeled as *gtam tshogs*. Second, in the sixth volume of compositions, one finds short instructions on ethics, tailored to the needs of specific students, as Mipham articulates. These are labeled *zhal gdams*.<sup>208</sup>

In fact, in looking at all of the texts in the two volumes, there are multiple patterns that emerge: overlaps in content and rhetoric, as discussed above. It will be the work of this dissertation to analyze some of these overlaps. Given the looseness of the genre labels of *zhal gdams* and *gtam tshogs*, I feel justified in treating the compositions in these two categories together. Both sets contain thoughtfully composed, rhetorically intricate ethical instructions of Patrul's.

Why, then, call them "life-advice?" The choice of "life-advice," reflects the overlap in instruction – these works contain counsel about both worldly ethics and soteriologically-oriented self-development exercises. Both kinds of instruction address the limitations of people's lives, as currently constituted, and offer strong suggestions for how to improve their lives. "Life-advice," then, seems general enough to encapsulate both what we would call "secular" and "religious" advice. The idea for calling Patrul's *zhal gdams* and *gtams tshogs* "life-advice" takes its inspiration from Jeffrey Hopkins's rendering of the first section of Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* as "advice for living."<sup>209</sup> Hopkins chooses this term in reference to Nāgārjuna's ethical instructions

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 21-25.

<sup>209</sup> Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice*, 22. Thanks to Leonard van der Kuijp for also suggesting the translation "advice for living."

that lead to higher rebirths and prepare the practitioner for the more ambitious “advice for liberation.” While I trace my use of the term “life-advice” to Hopkins’s “advice for living,” I obviously use it in a different way: employing “life-advice” in reference to Patrul’s directions for self-improvement that concern both worldly and liberatory goals.

Each of the four chapters that follow addresses one of Patrul’s life-advice compositions. Unfortunately, I have not been able to establish the date of composition for any of these texts, as the colophons to Patrul’s works never list dates. Chapter 2 offers a rhetorical analysis of *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End* (*Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam*). This text is found in volume 6 of his collected works in six volumes, and volume 8 of the more recent editions of his collected works printed in China.<sup>210</sup> The text’s publication in Tibetan, its commentary by leading nineteenth-twentieth century figure Khenpo Shenga, and its translation into English with a commentary by one of the leading Tibetan Buddhist teachers of the twentieth century Dilgo Khyentse (Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Bkra shis dpal 'byor, 1910-1991), attest to the text’s importance amongst a certain lineage of Tibetans.<sup>211</sup> The work has also been popular enough to have been printed on a number of occasions independently of Patrul’s collected works.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Collected Works*, vol. 6; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8.; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8.

<sup>211</sup> Khenpo Shenga wrote a commentary, which is referenced in Dilgo Khyentse, *The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones*, 229: Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba, *Thog mtha' bar gsum dge ba'i gtam gyi 'bru 'grel rgyal sras lam bzang*. This commentary was considered significant enough to have been transmitted to Dilgo Khyentse. See Dilgo Khyentse, *Brilliant Moon*, 38. Dilgo Khyentse, *Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones*, provides a translation along with Dilgo Khyentse’s commentary. Patrul Rinpoche, *The Practice of the Essence of the Sublime Heart Jewel*, is Thinley Norbu’s translation.

<sup>212</sup> At least two Tibetan editions of the *Discourse Virtuous in the Beginning, Middle and End* have been published outside of Patrul’s collected works. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Thog Mtha' Bar Gsum* 1972; and Rdza dpal sprul, *Thog Mtha' Bar Gsum* 1963.



It is difficult to pinpoint a single intended audience for the text. It contains references to esoteric meditation instructions in its outline of the path to liberation, and strongly advocates for its audience to embark upon solitary meditation in a retreat cave. This content suggests the work to have been directed at monks or lay students who were able to dedicate their lives to pursuing Buddhist self-development. Still, the work does not offer any secret instructions on how to carry out the exercises that it briefly mentions. Further, the primary practice that it prescribes is the chanting of a simple mantra (*oṃ mani padme hūṃ*), a practice that Patrul regularly taught to all. It seems, therefore, that the work could well have functioned as an overview of the Buddhist path for a broader audience.

Chapter 3 focuses on *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* (*Gdol pa'i drang srong gi gtam*). The text appears in the first volume of the various editions of Patrul's collected works. The text was sufficiently well known during Patrul's lifetime that an incarnate lama named Lozang Tsultrim Tenpe Gyaltzen (*Blo bzang tshul khrims Bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1838/1848-1897) requested an explanation (*bshad khrid*) of the text from Patrul.<sup>213</sup> The work covers quite basic Buddhist categories, making it suitable for beginners—novice monks or laypeople. It is written in simple (if witty) verses that form short sentences. Still, as we will see in chapter 3, the work does prescribe advanced meditation practices. This composition is a good example of how Patrul's life-advice may have been suitable for multiple levels of audience. A translation of the work appears in Appendix I.

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<sup>213</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 208-9.

Chapter 4 looks at *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* (*Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*). This text also appears in the first volume of the editions of Patrul's collected works. While I cannot offer a confident account of its reception history, two contemporary (well educated) Tibetan Nyingmapas were very familiar with the work.<sup>214</sup> One prominent teacher did suggest to me, however, that this work was “not serious” (in comparison with *Words of My Perfect Teacher* or *The Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King*). As my analysis shows, the text functions rhetorically on multiple levels. It contains oblique references to technical categories and canonical treatises, and hints at hidden philosophical meanings. At the same time, it is an explicitly playful and humorous composition and takes the form of a simple narrative. Even more than *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, it exemplifies Patrul's capacity to address multiple audiences at once. A translation of *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* also appears in Appendix I.

Chapter 5 introduces a short, eight-line teaching that I will refer to as *The Six Condensed Points of Profound Essential Advice* (*Gdams zab gnad kyi mdo 'gags drug*). It appears at a critical juncture in Kunzang Palden's biography of Patrul. These lines are also found in Patrul's popular narrative *Drama in the Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlog gar*). This latter composition, an advice work composed for an aristocrat whose wife had recently died, appears in multiple anthologies of exemplary Tibetan writing.<sup>215</sup> It likewise appears in the first volume of the editions of Patrul's collected works. The

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<sup>214</sup> Personal communication with Thupten Phuntsok and Zagtso Paldor.

<sup>215</sup> Blo bzang chos grags and Bsod nams rtse mo, eds. *Rtsom yig gser gyi sbam bu*; Lha mkhar tshe ring, ed., *Rtsom yig gces bsdu*.

work has also received sufficient attention from contemporary Tibetans to have been translated twice into English.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Tulku Thondup's translation in *Enlightened Living*; Acharya Nyima Tsering's translation in Patrul Rinpoche, *The Lotus Garden's Play*.

## Chapter 2: The *Maṇi*—Patrul and Pathos

The work of decoding the rhetorical logic of Patrul's advice compositions begins in this chapter with an analysis of one of Patrul's best-known works. Like many of his life-advice texts, this work offers an overview of the path to liberation. Upon analysis, however, it becomes clear that the work does not supply actual instructions on how to practice. Rather it seeks to configure its implied audience's attitude towards one particular self-development exercise. This chapter therefore explores the emotional logic of the work and considers the advantages and disadvantages of its persuasive strategy.

The text in question, entitled the *Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, is fourteen pages in length.<sup>217</sup> It features provocative metaphors for the hopelessness of life in the social world (described as an island of untamed demons),<sup>218</sup> and motivates panic about our solitary fate (promising our future separation from loved ones like an unwanted hair pulled out from a slab of butter).<sup>219</sup> It condenses the entire, complex path to liberation into a singular, accessible practice (chanting a short prayer associated with the deity of compassion).<sup>220</sup>

It is, not surprisingly, a composition in three parts. The first section is constituted by verses that despair at the uselessness of worldly activities. The final section exhorts the audience to begin practicing immediately, bemoaning the ways in

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<sup>217</sup> The full name of the text is the *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End: The Pure Heart Treasure of the Practice of View, Meditation, and Activity* (*Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam lta sgom spyod gsum nyams len dam pa'i snying nor*). The references that follow will refer to the text as published in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 127-140.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-137.

which we waste our time on eating, sleeping, and collecting wealth. The majority of the work, the middle section, is dedicated to a summary, in verse, of the entire Buddhist path, beginning with the practice of taking refuge in the Buddha’s teachings and concluding with post-meditation techniques for advanced yogic practitioners. The text thus establishes an argument for the necessity of self-development, outlines the program for such development, and finally makes a case for the pressing nature of self-cultivation. (A table of the path in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* appears in Appendix IV.)

From one perspective, the *Discourse* is an example of Tibetan practice instructions: it offers its audience a compact introduction to the full array of self-development practices necessary for attaining liberation. Given the lack of explanation of any of the practices mentioned, however, it is clear that the text does not intend to educate its audience about the actual performance of the rituals and meditations that it endorses. One of the first stanzas of practice-instruction in the composition illustrates this point:

The root of the *Mahāyāna* path is *bodhicitta* (“the mind of awakening”)
 This supreme thought is the single path traversed by all Conquerors
 Never being separate from this good path—the mind of awakening—
 In a state of compassion for beings, recite the six-syllable mantra.<sup>221</sup>

This verse is typical of Patrul’s advice instructions. It identifies a singularly essential practice (the development of the “mind of awakening”—the single path that all Buddhas have traveled). The pointing out of a singularly important practice is a ubiquitous trope in Patrul’s life-advice. The verse also connects the development of

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<sup>221</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 131: *theg chen lam gyi rtsa ba byang chub sems/ sems mchog rgyal ba kun gyi bgrod gcig lam/ lam bzang byang chub sems dang mi 'bral zhing/ 'gro la snying rje'i ngang nas yig drug sgrongs/*

“the mind of awakening” to one of Patrul’s favorite practices: chanting “the six-syllable mantra” (*om maṇi padme hūṃ*). Yet the stanza does not offer any instructions on how to generate the “mind of awakening,” nor do any subsequent verses provide such instructions. The brevity of these verses on the practice of generating the mind of awakening stands in stark contrast to the detailed explanations on how to cultivate the mind of awakening found elsewhere in Patrul’s oeuvre.<sup>222</sup>

Patrul may well have originally intended the versified composition to function as a root text to which he (or others) could add oral or written commentary. One might think of mind-training compositions (*blo sbyong*) as establishing particularly relevant precedent, here. These short, versified treatises, while barely comprehensible as practice instructions on their own, have acted as the structure for commentaries and teachings by generations of Tibetan teachers.<sup>223</sup> At least two such commentaries to *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End* have appeared, one by Patrul’s near contemporary Khenpo Shenga<sup>224</sup> and one by the twentieth-century luminary Dilgo Khyentse.<sup>225</sup>

As I will argue, however, the text can be read as a self-sufficient whole, without the need to appeal to supplemental commentaries. It serves other purposes than to provide guidance on *how* to practice. It engages in a game of persuasion, configuring its implied audience’s emotional attitude towards the practices that it promotes. The text

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<sup>222</sup> See Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 195–262; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7, 312–429.

<sup>223</sup> See, for example, Geshe Chekawa’s *Training the Mind in Seven Points* (*Blo sbyong don bdun ma*). Patrul’s colleague Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo composed a set of explanations on how to practice these points, to cite but one instance of a *blo sbyong* root text affording the structure for more detailed teachings. See Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, “*Phan bde'i sa bon*.”

<sup>224</sup> Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba, *Thog mtha' bar gsum dge ba'i gtam gyi 'bru 'grel rgyal sras lam bzang*. This work is referenced in Dilgo Khyentse, *The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones*, 229.

<sup>225</sup> See Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Bkra shis dpal 'byor, *Thog mtha' bar gsum dge ba'i gtam gyi 'bru 'grel rgyal sras lam bzang*, translated in Dilgo Khyentse, *The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones*.

does not merely communicate normative content (the list of practices that constitute the path to liberation). Just as importantly, it transmits affective information: eliciting a set of emotional responses from its implied audience, responses to be associated with the singularly potent practice that it places at the center of its exposition.

The analysis of *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* that follows therefore attempts to demonstrate the benefits that come from scholarly attention to the rhetorical dimension of religious practice instructions. As I will show, there are significant dimensions to Patrul's work that would be entirely missed if one only noted the normative content of its development instructions.

### A Singular Practice

The singularly potent practice at the center of *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* is the chanting of the “*maṇi*” mantra—essentially a short prayer and invocation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, or Chenrezi in Tibetan (Tib: *spyan ras gzig*s). The chanting of this mantra—*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* (called the *maṇi*, for short)—is a popular practice in Tibet, one that Patrul championed in his teachings to diverse audiences.<sup>226</sup>

*The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* does not simply recommend this practice, however. To the contrary, the structure of the text suggests that it is attempting to inculcate in its implied audience an emotionally charged identification with the *maṇi* practice. The composition's rhetorical strategy is what we might call, in

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<sup>226</sup> Patrul's biographies credit him for spreading the *maṇi* practice to nomadic communities in Northern Kham, for example. Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 202. Patrul also commonly taught the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, a treasure revelation that includes devotional practices towards Avalokiteśvara, including the chanting of his mantra. Patrul taught this text to both monks and commoners. Ibid., 197, 200, 201. Patrul's fondness for the *maṇi* mantra is also apparent in *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*, a composition that we will explore in chapters 4-5.

Aristotelian terms, one of *pathos*. It appeals to its audience's emotions for persuasive purposes. The composition beckons its audience to imagine the *maṇi* as a "singular refuge" in an otherwise hopeless world, and as a "singular essence" that encapsulates everything important in the otherwise overwhelmingly complex program of self-development outlined in the text.

The work aspires to mold its audience's emotional connection to the *maṇi* practice by mobilizing a series of traditional Buddhist tropes—well-rehearsed modes of discourse inherited from Buddhist compositions of the past. What makes *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* interesting is the way in which the work skillfully combines these inherited forms of speech in order to communicate with its audience on an affective level. The goals of my analysis are to explicate the rationale behind this exposition and to interrogate the conditions under which it would be successful.

### **The Rhetoric of Despair**

The *Discourse* opens with a series of arguments that systematically dispel any notion of optimism towards everyday, social life. Its cynical verses take aim at both the people around us and at the activities that we value. It rejects other human beings as untrustworthy and even dangerous; it redefines supposedly good things and positive activities as harmful; and it warns of the danger of distraction that necessarily accompanies quotidian life. In attacking all things that its audience might consider to be worthwhile, the text systematically roots out any hope for a productive life in society.



So, for example, *The Discourse* warns that life in contemporary times is dangerous. It is like living on an island of untamed demons, with the implication being that there is no way to escape from one's dangerous neighbors.

Oh! Having looked at the beings of the degenerate (times) this mind is confused  
Oh! Who can trust anyone's speech?  
It is like living on an island of untamed demons.<sup>227</sup>

Compounding the danger of our predicament is the fact that we are entirely alone. People in this degenerate age act deceitfully (*g.yo sgyu spyod*), with twisted thoughts and words (*'khyog po*), leaving us no one to trust. Whomever we come across is fraudulent, a master of deceit (*slu byed mkhan*).<sup>228</sup> The text even implicates those teachers (like Patrul) who offer “explanatory discourses” (*bshad gtam*).<sup>229</sup> There is simply nowhere to turn for help. Even after we die, we won't be any better off. We will continue on to a new rebirth, alone. “Once again, like a hair pulled out of a round of butter, you will go ahead alone, leaving behind everything,” the text explains.<sup>230</sup>

The work's cynical verses also reject seemingly virtuous activities. Being a learned scholar is of no help: it only leads to debate. Being realized (meaning have done lots of meditation practice) is likewise useless, it doesn't help you meet other's needs. Nor does being in a position of leadership serve anyone—it just leads to unrest amongst those below you.<sup>231</sup>

And what about one's responsibility to others? Even if one's peers are untrustworthy, shouldn't they still be helped? Shouldn't a *bodhisattva* be committed to

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<sup>227</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 128: *kyi hud snyigs 'gro mthong nas blo 'di rmongs/ kye ma su yid ngag la su yid rton/ mi srin po'i gling na gnas 'dra 'di/*

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>229</sup> Criticism of false teachers appears relatively frequently in Patrul's advice writings. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 287 for another such example.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 128: *da yang mar gyi dkyil nas spu bton ltar/ thams cad bzahag nas rang nyid gcig pur 'gro/*

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 128.

the benefit of other people, regardless of their shortcomings? The text asserts that traditional religious pursuits are useless: if one is to act according to the dharma, it will only contradict the normative behavior of one's peers and thereby make everyone angry.<sup>232</sup> Since people are themselves crooked and dishonest, they will judge the honest people to be the crooked one, it explains. Therefore it is best give up the hope of benefiting others altogether.<sup>233</sup>

These morose verses serve to generate despair in the audience. In so doing, they participate in a long tradition of discourse aimed at generating disgust with everyday reality (an Asian tradition of argumentation that is by no means restricted to Buddhist texts). Buddhist teachers, like all those who advocate engaging in sustained regimes of transformation, need to motivate their students to embark upon a strenuous path of self-cultivation. Buddhist writings are replete with statements identifying the problems with everyday life. They appear as authoritative statements in discourses attributed to the historical Buddha, in poetic narratives, in Sanskrit epistles, and in Tibetan pedagogical dialogues.

With that said, not all arguments for renunciation are alike. In contrast to *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End*, early sermons of the Buddha return time and again to the idea that worldly goals, responsibilities, pleasures and accomplishments are meaningless because of the inevitability of suffering that comes in the form of old age, sickness, and death. If one cannot avoid these immanent threats, there is no point in enjoying one's present endeavors, let alone making future

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 128-9.

plans. The only logical response to the suffering of life and inevitability of death is to discover a path to complete liberation.

We find arguments in the *Nikāyas* to such ends. In the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, for example, the Buddha's point is quite clear. The problem with seeking after worldly things like wives, sons, servants, and livestock, is that these things are all subject to old age, sickness, death, and impurity.<sup>234</sup> The threat of these forms of suffering makes our everyday lives inherently dangerous.

Similar arguments, focusing on the threat of old, sickness, and death, are present in Aśvaghoṣa's *Life of the Buddha* (Skt: *Buddhacarita*) and *Handsome Nanda* (Skt: *Saundarananda*). In the *Life of the Buddha*, the prince Siddhartha famously becomes turned off by the luxuries of his princely lifestyle once he comes in contact with an old man, a sick man, and a dead man on his travels outside of the palace. In arguing with his attendant Udāyin about why he has rejected the advances of the beautiful courtesans who are flirting with him, he exclaims that only those who are ignorant of old age, sickness and death could possibly enjoy the pleasures of this world.<sup>235</sup> The fear that accompanies the acknowledgement of old age, sickness and death makes it impossible for Siddhartha to enjoy the pleasures of his life. Because the specter of old age, sickness and death casts its shadow over all impermanent pleasures of this life, the supposedly good things of this life are meaningless.

The Buddha makes a similar argument to his half-brother Nanda in Aśvaghoṣa's *Handsome Nanda*. If there were no old age, no sickness, no death, then we would all be able to enjoy bliss. "If these three did not exist," he proclaims, "bliss would be

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<sup>234</sup> Holder, ed., *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 4.

<sup>235</sup> Aśvaghoṣa, *Life of the Buddha*, 105.

yours.”<sup>236</sup> Since this is not the case, renunciation is the only viable option. Trying to enjoy one’s life given the certainty of disease, old age and death is like settling to sleep in a house ablaze, the Buddha continues in the narrative.<sup>237</sup> The fear of these forms of suffering should negate any enjoyment we have of life’s pleasures.

There is more to the renunciation discourse of the *suttas*, or of Aśvaghoṣa’s *kāvya*, than the content of their claims. Such arguments are articulated by means of certain rhetorical modalities; in the case of Aśvaghoṣa, they fit into a narrative structure and are delivered via carefully constructed, poetic language. Of primary importance for the present analysis is the availability of modes of renunciation discourse to later Buddhist teachers, like Patrul. By showing how Patrul’s rhetoric is different from these examples, I will be able to better clarify the choices that Patrul makes in constructing *The Discourse* as he does.

To the point, *The Discourse*’s approach to renunciation rhetoric is of a slightly different variety. It systematically attacks all of our hopes for accomplishing anything of worth, including seemingly Buddhist goals of studying, teaching, and helping others, pursuits valorized in the *suttas* and in Aśvaghoṣa’s *kāvya*. The work’s thoroughgoing cynicism regarding everyday life is also inherited from prior Buddhist compositions, though. We find many of its arguments appearing in two advice compositions by Patrul’s acknowledged spiritual hero Longchenpa: the *Thirty Verses of Heart-Advice* (*Snying gdam sum cu pa*) and the *Completely Joyful Discourse on the Forest* (*Nags tshal kun tu dga’ ba’i gdam*). These two texts now appear in Longchenpa’s miscellaneous works collection (*gsung thor bu*), a collection which contains ten works labeled as *zhal gdams*

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<sup>236</sup> Aśvaghoṣa, *Handsome Nanda*, 103.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

and an additional four labeled as *gtam tshogs*.<sup>238</sup> Given Patrul's intimate familiarity with Longchenpa's major works, it is quite likely that these two compositions were models for Patrul's own life-advice compositions.<sup>239</sup>

Longchenpa's life-advice, like Patrul's, identifies other people as a problem—particularly in their capacity to cause entanglements and torment.<sup>240</sup> People of the degenerate age, Longchenpa's texts explain, are dangerous, causing you to generate bad karma.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, the supposedly good things of this world, pleasure included, are never satisfying.<sup>242</sup> Longchenpa's works, as do Patrul's after him, also dismiss the possibility of being of any benefit in one's social roles. Participation in village rituals, fundraising for religious projects, expounding the dharma, amassing wealth, settling disputes, doing monastic jobs, learning, accumulating teachings, and even writing religious songs are all harmful activities. Such activities can only lead to self-clinging and other harms, they poetically declare.<sup>243</sup>

Some of Longchenpa's verses are nearly identical to those of Patrul. If you explain the dharma in these degenerate times, Longchenpa's life-advice assert, others

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<sup>238</sup> For Longchenpa's miscellaneous works, printed from the xylographs prepared at the Derge printery, see Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*. Both the *zhal gdams* and *gtam tshogs* appear in volume 1. Given that Patrul's predecessor Jigme Lingpa helped to oversee the printing of Longchenpa's works in Derge in the late eighteenth century, Patrul's devotion to Longchenpa, and Patrul's geographic proximity to Derge, it is more than likely that he would have had access to Longchenpa's *Gsung thor bu*. For the printing of some of Longchenpa's writings under the auspices of Jigme Lingpa, see Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 25.

<sup>239</sup> Patrul wrote a short explication of Longchenpa's *Sems nyid ngal gso*, commonly taught Longchenpa's *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel* commentary on the *Guhyagarbha*, and composed a hymn in praise of Longchenpa's *Mdzod bdun*. For Patrul on the *Sems nyid ngal gso*, see *Sems nyid ngal gso'i bsdus don padma dkar po'i zil mngar*, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3; For Patrul on Longchenpa's *Mdzod bdun*, see *Klong chen pa'i gsung rab mdzod bdun la lta bar bskul ba*, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 2/3.

<sup>241</sup> Longchenpa, *Visionary Journey*, 3; Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*, vol. 1, 119.

<sup>242</sup> Longchenpa, *Visionary Journey*, 6; Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*, vol. 1, 121.

<sup>243</sup> Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 2-7.

will come to revile you.<sup>244</sup> Compare these statements, for example, to Patrul's claim that if one is to act according to the dharma, it will only contradict the normative behavior of one's peers and thereby make everyone angry.<sup>245</sup>

Longchenpa's writings also feature warnings about the danger of distractions that reappear in Patrul's advice works. One wastes away one's life with normal activities, even with activities such as arranging the things in one's home when one is alone.<sup>246</sup> The eight worldly concerns (praise and blame, fame and fear of insignificance, gain and loss, happiness and suffering) are perennial distractions, keeping one concerned with this life instead of one's lives to come.<sup>247</sup> Even studying the five sciences becomes a distraction.<sup>248</sup>

Patrul and Longchenpa's renunciation rhetoric is much different than that which appears in the *Nikāyas* and Aśvaghōṣa's *kāvya*. It is not the threat of future suffering, in the form of sickness, old age, and death that are the problem. Rather, it is the futility of accomplishing anything in this life in the first place. The people around us are dangerous and only cause us problems, not simply because they will become sick and die. Virtuous activities are useless because these people are so corrupted that our attempts to help are both a waste of time and a dangerous distraction.

This attitude is quite different from that of the historical Buddha, as represented in the *Nikāyas*. The Buddha had similar concerns about teaching his peers after his Enlightenment.

Enough with teaching the Dhamma

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<sup>244</sup> Longchenpa, *Visionary Journey*, 3-4; Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*, vol. 1, 120.

<sup>245</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 129.

<sup>246</sup> Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 6/7.

<sup>247</sup> Longchenpa, *Visionary Journey*, 5; Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*, vol. 1, 120-1.

<sup>248</sup> Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 12/13.

That even I found hard to reach;  
For it will never be perceived  
By those who live in lust and hate.<sup>249</sup>

Yet the Buddha is subsequently convinced by the Brahmā Sahampati to teach others. This episode from the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* rejects the very logic that appears in Longchenpa and Patrul's life advice. Despite the unlikelihood of one's peers responding well to the teaching of the dharma, Buddha asserts that one should nonetheless strive to teach them. In Longchenpa and Patrul's writings, the very opposite is the case. One should not waste time trying to teach those who are unlikely to understand or approve of your teaching.

A foundational conceit of the form of renunciation discourse that we find in Patrul and Longchenpa is that we are currently living in a degenerate age (Tib: *snyigs 'gro*, short for *snyigs ma'i dus 'dir gro ba*).<sup>250</sup> The idea that one is living in a particularly corrupt age is also an inherited trope, ubiquitous in South Asian discourse, Buddhist and otherwise. This trope of corruption, articulated in a variety of ways and justified with a variety of arguments, became influential in Buddhist cultures in both South and East Asia.<sup>251</sup>

It is crucial to the broader strategy at play in *The Discourse* that it engender a sense of complete hopelessness. Its charged rhetoric does so by effectively redefining our social lives. While we may have thought of the social world as a place where we could find support from our friends and family, it instead depicts the world as devoid of anyone that we can trust. Where we might have looked to experts for help and

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<sup>249</sup> Bodhi, ed., *In the Buddha's Words*, 70. This quotation comes from the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, found in the *Majjhimanikāya*.

<sup>250</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 127; Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 6/7; Longchenpa, *Visionary Journey*, 2; Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Gsung thor bu*, vol. 1, 119.

<sup>251</sup> For one analysis of this phenomenon, see Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*.

instruction, it suggests that we are surrounded only by cunning manipulators and expert liars. Where we might have thought of the social world as our home, it describes society as a dangerous trap: an island filled with those who prey on you.

By contrasting Patrul and Longchenpa's cynical form of renunciation rhetoric with alternative modes of renunciation discourse in the *suttas* and *kāvya*, I am hoping to make clear the choice that Patrul makes in constructing *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End* as he does. Patrul makes a decision to mobilize images of the hopelessness of this age. His coupling of degenerate age arguments with the cynical brand of renunciation rhetoric described above serves a specific purpose, I will argue.

### A Solitary Solution

Given the breadth of *The Discourse's* critique of the degenerate age, it should not be surprising that it recommends to its audience the total escape from society. The time has come, it proposes, for leaving the social world altogether and living alone, in a mountain retreat.

Hide your body: stay alone in the solitary mountains  
Hide your speech: say little and cut yourself off from all contact  
Hide your mind: stare directly at your own faults, only  
This is what it means to be a hidden yogi.<sup>252</sup>

For *The Discourse*, social life is hopeless. The solution to this predicament is to hide oneself away from all contact with others, completely alone.

The proposal of a “solitary solution” to life's problems is found in another of Patrul's life-advice compositions, his *Hermit's Discourse* (*Dben pa'i gtam*). *The Hermit's Discourse* aspires to motivate its implied audience to take up residence in a hermit's

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<sup>252</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 129: *lus sbas dben pa'i ri la gcig pur sdod/ ngag sbas smra ma mang 'brel thag chod/ sems sbas rang skyon kho nar cer re ltos/ sbas pa'i rnal 'byor zer na de la zer/*



cave by exploring the advantages of such a locale.<sup>253</sup> Yet another of Patrul's life-advice works repeats a refrain that one should retire to a retreat cave.<sup>254</sup>

The ideal of retreat to a solitary cave thus comes up over and over in Patrul's life-advice compositions. A solitary retreat is a place to escape the responsibilities that come from living in the social world.<sup>255</sup> It is also somewhere free from distraction. The independence that one can find in a solitary existence brings one happiness, in contrast to the sorrow that comes from dependence on others.<sup>256</sup> In Patrul's advice, a retreat cave is described as a kind of heaven—where one is kept company by protective deities.<sup>257</sup>

The ideal of a solitary life in the forest has plenty of precedent in Buddhist literature. Similar rhetoric is found in one of Longchenpa's previously mentioned works, *The Completely Joyful Discourse on the Forest*, a text whose refrain beckons its audience to retreat to the forest. Longchenpa's *Thirty Verses of Heart-Advice* echoes this suggestion, recommending that one stay by oneself,<sup>258</sup> avoid the bustle of everyday life,<sup>259</sup> and achieve the independence,<sup>260</sup> the lack of needs,<sup>261</sup> and distractions<sup>262</sup> that come with the solitary life in a forest.

One important historical source for “solitary solution” rhetoric is Buddhist epistle literature. Candragomin, for example, makes strong arguments for the benefit

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 351-355.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 335.

<sup>256</sup> This sentiment is most clearly articulated in Patrul's *Gzhon nu blo ldan gyi dris lan*. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 31-55; Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*, 37ff.

<sup>257</sup> For an entire composition devoted to the advantages of solitary practice in a retreat cave, see Patrul's *Dben pa'i gtam lha'i rnga sgra*. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 351-365.

<sup>258</sup> Longchenpa, *Thirty Verses*, 2/3.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 6/7.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 10/11.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 6/7.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 14/15.

of such a life in his *Śiṣyalekha*. The solitary life in the forest is a way to escape the defilements of householder life,<sup>263</sup> he declares, and frees one from dangerous encounters with others.<sup>264</sup> This same work also features idealistic, metaphorical descriptions of luxuriousness of retreat,<sup>265</sup> descriptions similar to ones that appear in Longchenpa and Patrul's writings.

There is good strategic reason for Patrul to apply this discursive form in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*. The repeated mention of “the single” and “the solitary” is a running theme in the work. One cannot help but notice the repeated use of phrases including the Tibetan word “one” (*gcig*) early in the composition: a single drop of nectar (*bdud rtsi'i zegs ma gcig*) in the poetic opening homage, one's solitary consciousness (*rnam shes gcig pu*) going alone (*gcig pur 'gro*) from life to life in verse seven, Patrul's entreaty to live alone and self-sufficiently (*rang nyid gcig pu rang dgar gnas par mdzod*) in verse fifteen, and his instruction to stay alone in a solitary mountain hermitage (*dben pa'i ri la gcig pur sdod*) in verse seventeen.<sup>266</sup>

The repeated use of the language of the singular and the solitary sets up a dramatic moment in the composition. Just as it may seem that the text is suggesting that we are completely alone (*gcig pu*) with our troubles, it suddenly shifts its tone by introducing a *singular* savior (*gcig dgon*):

Oh sole protector, compassionate treasure,  
Chenrezi (Avalokiteśvara), you are my root guru and protector  
The six-syllable mantra is the essence of your speech, the true dharma  
Now, I have no hope beyond you . . .

<sup>263</sup> See *Śiṣyalekha*, verse 71, in Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 98/99.

<sup>264</sup> Verse 68. Ibid., 96/97.

<sup>265</sup> Verse 69, Ibid., 98/99.

<sup>266</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 127-130.

... now the time has come for reciting the six-syllable mantra, the thing that is certain to be beneficial.<sup>267</sup>

In a degenerate world, Avalokiteśvara is our sole hope.<sup>268</sup> Having instructed its audience to take refuge in this singular savior, the text puts all of its faith in a singular practice: the chanting of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable mantra, "oṃ maṇi padme hum."

The *maṇi* (the six-syllable mantra), and the compassionate deity Avalokiteśvara with which it is identified, acts as an answer to the despair, hopelessness and existential loneliness ideally generated by the cynical verses that precede their introduction. In the face of the desperate hopelessness of the renunciation verses, *The Discourse* offers the hope of refuge in Avalokiteśvara and his mantra. In contrast to the uselessness of attempts to help others given the degeneracy of this age, chanting the *maṇi* is one thing that is truly beneficial. In contrast to the loneliness of the solitary solution, the text presents the ever-available presence of the singularly powerful Avalokiteśvara.

Patrul's text both literally and figuratively presents Avalokiteśvara and the *maṇi* as a refuge. The idea of refuge is another traditional Buddhist *topos*. Buddhist novices typically take part in ceremonies in which they take refuge in three (all-encompassing) items: first, in the Buddha (as teacher and model of enlightened activity), second, in the dharma (his teachings that lead to liberation from suffering), and third, in the *saṅgha* (the community of liberated beings, or, in a more mundane sense, the community of

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 130: kye ma bdag gi mgon gcig thug rje'i gter/ rtsa ba'i bla ma mgon po spyen ras gzigs/ gsung gi snying po dam chos yi ge drug/ da ni re sa khyed las mi 'dug go ... phan nges yig drug bgrang ba'i dus la bab/

<sup>268</sup> See the opening of Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* for an early example of a Buddhist advice text using this (common) literary figure of identifying a perfect benefactor as one's sole protector. "I prostrate to the one liberated from all faults, adorned with all the good qualities, who is the **single friend** of all beings." The Tibetan, as it appears in the Derge Tanjur, reads: nyes pa kun las rnam grol zhing/ yon tan kun gyis brgyan pa po/ sems can kun gyi **gnyen gcig po**/ thams cad mkhyen la bdag phyag 'tshal // Tshul khrims rin chen, ed., *Sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 172, 213.

practitioners). In place of the triple refuge of *buddha-dharma-saṅgha*, Patrul strategically substitutes a singular object of refuge— Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, who one accesses through the simple chanting of his six-syllable mantra. The *maṇi* as refuge is thus another example of Patrul using traditional Buddhist forms for his own specific, rhetorical ends. Here, the appeal to a salvific refuge is particularly potent, coming, as it does, right after twenty verses that hammer home how much in need of help we are in this otherwise hopeless age.

### Singularity

The singular potency of chanting Avalokiteśvara’s *maṇi* mantra becomes increasingly clear. Avalokiteśvara and his mantra not only save us from the despair of our otherwise hopeless lives, but they also provide the key to liberation. *The Discourse* is explicit about the centrality of Avalokiteśvara and the *maṇi* on the path to liberation:

One deity, Chenrezi, encompasses [gathers together] all conquerors [Buddhas]  
 One mantra, the six-syllables, encompasses all mantras . . .  
 Knowing the one that liberates all, recite the six-syllable mantra.<sup>269</sup>

Avalokiteśvara, as a singular embodiment of all enlightened beings, and his mantra, as the singular expression of all enlightened speech, encapsulate enlightenment. Here we have a dramatic example of Patrul’s ubiquitous appeal to the singularity trope, wherein he presents a single practice as uniquely powerful.

The text reminds its audience again and again that the entire path can be simplified in view of Avalokiteśvara and his mantra. Avalokiteśvara is the single essence of the three jewels. He is the essential nature of the four empowerments. The

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 137: *Lha gcig rgyal ba kun 'dus spyan ras gzigs/ sngags gcig snying po kun 'dus yi ge 'drug/ . . . gcig shes kun 'grol ngang nas yig drug sgrongs*. The idea that knowing one thing allows one to know all things of importance also has a long history in Buddhist discourse. For an analysis of one such example, see McClintock, “Knowing All Through Knowing One.”

one deity Avalokiteśvara embodies all of the Buddhas, his six-syllable mantra encapsulates all mantras, and his dharma practice of generating *bodhicitta* encompasses all practices of generation and completion stage yoga. Avalokiteśvara is a prism through which the text asks its audience to view the entire path to Enlightenment. In so doing, the work structures its exposition of the path to enlightenment around the singular practice of taking refuge in Avalokiteśvara by chanting his mantra.

The trope of singularity—coming on the heels of the employment of cynical renunciation rhetoric and an appeal to the idea of a refuge—acts as an organizing principle for the composition. After introducing Avalokiteśvara and the *maṇi* mantra as singular refuges in an otherwise hopeless world, the text goes on to summarize, in verse, the entire Buddhist path, beginning with the practice of taking refuge and concluding with post-meditation techniques for advanced yogic practitioners. The instruction to recite the *maṇi* acts as a refrain for each verse summarizing the path. For example, to conclude the verse that introduces the practice of generating *bodhicitta* (the attitude of liberation), the text instructs: “in a state of compassion for beings, recite the six syllables.”<sup>270</sup> Or again, after explaining that one’s own mind is ultimately no other than the *dharmakāya* (the dharma body), it proclaims: “knowing your own mind to be the Buddha, recite the six syllables.”<sup>271</sup>

The use of a repetitive refrain is an expositional strategy that serves to simplify the diverse instructions that appear in the work. The repetitive refrain acts as a tie that binds together all of the distinct instructions that appear from verse to verse,

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<sup>270</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 131: 'gro la snying rje'i ngang nas yig drug sgrongs.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 136: rang sems sangs rgyas shes pas yig drug sgrongs.

giving them a semblance of uniformity. The use of a refrain to lend unity to a diversity of instructions is a technique that appears in many of Patrul's advice works.<sup>272</sup>

There is a tension between the text presenting the *maṇi* as the essence of the entire path, and yet still offering mention of all of the other practices that one is to take up along the way to liberation. Why, if chanting the *maṇi* is all that one needs, does it detail all of the other practices on the path? In practice, Patrul's singularity rhetoric acts as a proliferative strategy. Under the guise of the singular, as represented by the repeating refrain, the text delivers a diverse range of instructions. While simplifying the solution to our problems by emphasizing one simple chant, it nonetheless advocates a whole series of additional self-improvement techniques. Claiming to do one thing (offering a single, powerful soteriological solution) the work actually does another (provides a series of many practices that together lead to liberation). This tension between simplification and proliferation will be a central theme of chapter 3.

### **The Emotional Logic of *The Discourse***

To review, in addition to the smaller rhetorical figures, images, and arguments that appear in each of *The Discourse*'s stanzas, the work employs three dominant tropes in attempt to engage the emotions of its audience. It matches a cynical version of Buddhist renunciation rhetoric (with a particularly forceful appeal to the idea of a degenerate age) with an articulation of a simple practice as refuge. This combination of renunciation rhetoric with refuge rhetoric aspires to lead the audience from hopelessness to hope.

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<sup>272</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 275, 286, 288, 307, 366.

By inviting its implied audience to share in its persistent anguish over the hopelessness of worldly endeavors, the work endeavors to provoke an emotionally rich investment in the singular practice of chanting the *maṇi*. By the time the text introduces the six-syllable mantra, the audience is primed for a hopeful turn. The *maṇi*, in the mind of the implied audience, is thus imbued with the pathos generated by the despair-laden verses of the first third of the composition. *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* thereby does more than simply advocate a preferred practice. Rather, it attempts to configure its audience's feelings about such a practice. For an ideal audience that has worked through the text's passionately cynical verses, the very thought of chanting the *maṇi* should feel like refuge—an escape from the feeling of hopelessness just experienced.

*The Discourse* thereby communicates affective content to its audience by means of its structure. The work does not simply advise its audience to take up a religious practice. To the contrary, it attempts to directly manipulate its audience's emotions. I would argue that a primary goal of the composition is to generate a positive affective association with the *maṇi* practice, to have its audience associate chanting the *maṇi* with hope. Beyond simply stating that Avalokiteśvara and his mantra are sources of hope, as it does in verse twenty-two,<sup>273</sup> it aspires to cause its audience to experience the relief of having found a source of salvation.

Attention to the rhetorical logic of the work unearths the probable reason for Patrul to have structured his composition as he did. Patrul specifically chose a certain form of renunciation rhetoric, chose to appeal to the trope of the degenerate age, chose

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 130.

to litter his verse with references to solitariness, and chose to describe the *maṇi* as a form of refuge. These decisions speak to his sensitivity to the emotional register of skillful discourse. Patrul's concern with this register is clear from his discussion of the risks and benefits of different forms of public speech, as articulated in the introduction to his dharma history (as discussed in chapter 1). In the *Discourse Good in Beginning, Middle and End*, Patrul's sensitivity to the emotional register is seen in his understanding of how to follow verses of despair with ones of hope. One is reminded, here, of the South Asian *rasa* theory, where Indian theorists debated at length the proper order of the aesthetic "moods" that appear in Sanskrit high literature.<sup>274</sup> Such theorizations never caught on in Tibet.<sup>275</sup> Still, the logic of the composition does speak to Patrul's intuitive sense for how to set up his audience emotionally.

The move from hopelessness to hope is only part of the text's attempts to configure its audience's feelings about chanting the *maṇi*. The work reinforces its audience's emotional investment in the *maṇi* practice by repeatedly emphasizing the *maṇi*'s status as a singular encapsulation of the entire path—returning to the *maṇi* in each stanza's refrain in order to generate a feeling of *comfort* in its audience.

By appearing as it does as a refrain to each stanza, the *maṇi* offers the audience something familiar and manageable, defraying any anxiety caused by the introduction of the new material that each successive stanza brings. The good will generated towards the *maṇi* and the accompanying confidence in its salvific power that has been created carries throughout the text's survey of the path. Because each stanza of instructions concludes with the comforting reminder to chant the six-syllable mantra,

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<sup>274</sup> See, for example, Ingalls, trans., *Dhvaṇyāloka*, chapter 3.

<sup>275</sup> For a brief discussion of the limited impact of *rasa* theory in Tibet, Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers*, chapter 6.



the complexity of the path becomes less daunting for the implied audience. No matter how esoteric or demanding the practices that the text introduces, it reminds us every time that the most important thing to do is simply to chant the six-syllable mantra. It is as if the text is reminding us that no matter what demands the path to liberation seem to make upon us, everything is reducible to the simple, comforting practice of chanting the six syllables. The path is manageable because it is ultimately simply an expression of this simple yet potent practice. The logic of the composition thereby proceeds from despair, to hope, to comfort.

The composition thus uses the *maṇi* to solve two significant problems that arise out of its advice instructions: one related to the emotional consequences of renunciation arguments, and the second related to the emotional risks of laying out the complete path to enlightenment, with its many complex steps.

First, it is able to make a strong, passionate case for the need to change one's life (as articulated in its renunciation arguments) without risking depressing and therefore discouraging its audience. For any religious teacher who takes it upon himself to transmit religious self-cultivation instructions, there is the challenge to communicate to their audience what the problem is to be solved. In Patrul's case, the challenge is about motivation. How can Patrul convince the members of his audience that their lives as currently constituted are unsatisfactory? How can he, at once, mobilize his not inconsequential powers of persuasion to convince them, intellectually and emotionally, that their current aspirations are misplaced, yet still maintain their confidence? Patrul faces the same challenge that all religious instructors face. How can he deliver the bad

news—that they need to improve their lives—while simultaneously inspire the members of his audience to embrace the hard work of change?

Patrul solves this problem by matching his renunciation verses with his hopeful refuge discourse. The centrality of Avalokiteśvara and his accessible *maṇi* mantra serve to prevent Patrul’s audience from becoming overly dejected. In theory, the positive associations that the members of his audience have for the *maṇi* practice will help to motivate them to commit themselves to the long, challenging path to liberation.

Patrul’s charge in *The Discourse Pleasant in the Beginning, Middle and End*, to lay out the entirety of the path to enlightenment, brings with it another danger—the danger of overwhelm in his audience. The overwhelm that can accompany the myriad forms of Buddhist practice is explicitly acknowledged within the work when it calls attention to the impossibility of mastering all of the different visualization practices taught on the path.<sup>276</sup> The very idea of a long, complex path is the antithesis of the message of Patrul’s advice compositions, with their emphasis on simple, yet powerful practices.

Patrul’s use of the *maṇi* refrain is therefore a solution to the potential problem of audience overwhelm. Because each stanza of Patrul’s instructions is accompanied with the comforting reminder to chant the six-syllable mantra, the path becomes less daunting. Each step on the path is manageable because it is ultimately just an expression of one simple yet potent practice. The audience is ideally encouraged by the way that the text can make the complicated feel comforting. The *maṇi* as comforting refrain is thus a strategic complement to the task of presenting a concise rendition of the path to liberation.

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<sup>276</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 132.

## What Makes Patrul's Presentation Credible?

There is an elegance to the emotional logic of *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* that leads its audience from hopelessness to hope to comfort. Still, why would an audience take the text at its word that simply chanting a six-syllable prayer will solve all of the problems laid out so thoroughly in its opening verses? If things are truly so hopeless, would such a simple practice really be of any help?

If we look carefully, we can see various ways in which the text strives to establish trust and confidence in the authority of its model author. I have identified two primary strategies that *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* employs in the service of establishing Patrul's credibility as a reliable source of practice instructions.

The first strategy pertains to the totalizing logic of the composition. The force of the text's renunciation rhetoric is the thoroughness of its appeal. Everything that one might consider positive, it argues is negative. Everyone is untrustworthy, even those offering guidance are dishonest;<sup>277</sup> one's superiors, inferiors, and equals are all impossible to please;<sup>278</sup> seemingly positive activities like learning, meditating, and acting altruistically help no one;<sup>279</sup> there is no time to be happy;<sup>280</sup> staying busy with activities is meaningless, causing no benefit;<sup>281</sup> talking is likewise meaningless, leading only to distraction;<sup>282</sup> even eating leads to no benefit, it only produces to excrement,

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 128, 129.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 128-9.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 137.

while sleeping leaves you in a state of delusion;<sup>283</sup> your wishes only lead to confusion, while all that you own only leads to clinging.<sup>284</sup> For the text, it is not enough to say that there are problems with everyday life. Its approach, to the contrary, is to assert that *everything* is hopeless. While such a strategy risks alienating its audience, it nonetheless conveys a sense of total mastery over all facets of life.

The text confidently challenges its audience to contradict its assertions by asking rhetorical questions. “Who can trust what anyone says,” it asks. “Are you not ruining your life (by not practicing the dharma)?” “Wouldn’t it be good to cut oneself off altogether from the daily bustle?”<sup>285</sup> It also confronts its audience members directly, pressuring them to be decisive about their lives, right now. “Think about it (the impossibility of satisfying others) and make up your mind . . . give up hope . . . right now the time has come to hide oneself away . . . right now, have no more hopes or doubts.”<sup>286</sup> The thoroughness of its critique and the confident tone of its verses give the impression of an author in complete control over his subject matter.

Just as the renunciation verses convey the impression of an author in total control, so too do the verses about the path. The text’s singularity rhetoric, wherein it claims that the single hope is chanting the *maṇi*, conveys brashness and confidence. By stating that Avalokiteśvara and the *maṇi* are the essence of the entire path to liberation, the text in effect claims complete knowledge of this path. Infusing the long exposition of dozens of practices with this singularity rhetoric creatively conveys the model author’s totalizing control. It is as if the text is saying, not only do I know all of the

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 128-130.

practices that one needs to know in their specificity, but I also know these practices well enough to offer you a short-cut: the *maṇi* mantra.

The text reinforces this sense of total control with its appeal to traditional Buddhist lists. It explains how one should incorporate all of the different senses into one's practice: visual appearances, sounds, smells, flavors, physical sensations, and thoughts.<sup>287</sup> It offers instructions on how to handle all five of the negative emotions: hatred, pride, desire, jealousy, and delusion.<sup>288</sup> Finally it addresses how one should practice in relation to the five aggregates (*skandhas*), the traditional set of categories meant to categorize all of the constituent parts of the self (and, by extension, the entire phenomenal world). By using such lists in its exposition of the path, the text makes use of a long-standing Buddhist strategy for gaining intellectual control over a wide range of subject matter. Such overlapping lists (Skt: *māṭṛkāś*) can be understood as productive technologies for teachers. Given sufficient familiarity with these lists, a teacher can move from list to list, continually proliferating teachings of any length, all the while maintaining control over his subject matter.<sup>289</sup> So, for example, *The Discourse* interweaves statements about the six senses with instructions on six tantric practices, observations about the five defiled emotions with teachings about the five wisdoms, and connects the five aggregates to five forms of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The text's facility with these overlapping lists further displays the model author's mastery of all teachings.

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 134-5.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>289</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of the technology of overlapping lists in South Asian Buddhism see Gethin, "The Māṭikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List."

The text's totalizing discourse about the all-encompassing hopelessness of normal life and the singularly essential elements of the path to liberation project an image of control and mastery. The confidence of its verses, replete as they are with rhetorical questions and assertive directives, further works to convince its audience of the authority of its author. Finally, its interweaving of traditional Buddhist lists displays its author's mastery of his subject matter and thus demonstrates his competence as a Buddhist expert.

But the text's tone is not exclusively brash and bold. Rather, it couples this confident, totalizing strategy with moments of humility. Towards the end of the text, it calls attention to its own author as a way of connecting with its audience members as equals:

The first part: my sorrowful discourse about the activity of the degenerate age  
This discourse was counsel from myself to myself  
These words of lamentation affected my heart deeply  
I am offering them to you, as well, wondering if you [will feel] the same.<sup>290</sup>

This is the first instance that we have seen of reflexivity in our analysis of Patrul's advice compositions, though it will by no means be the last. Here, the text places its model author into the discursive field of the text by calling attention to his feelings.

Patrul—as the voice of the text—appears to be sharing something personal with his audience members. By talking about his own feelings, he establishes a common ground with them. He, like them, has emotions. He, like them, is in need of advice (even if he is able to provide counsel to himself). And he cares enough about his audience members to ask whether they have reacted to his sorrowful account as he has. Earlier in the composition, the text spoke to its audience members as subordinates,

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<sup>290</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 139: *dang por snyigs ma'i spyod la skyo ba'i gtam/ gtam 'di rang gis rang la gdams pa ste/ rang blo gting nas 'gyur ba'i smre sngags tshig/ khyed la'ang 'dra'am snyam nas phul ba lags/*

challenging them to make up their minds and renounce their hopeless lives. Here, however, it speaks as if its author is genuinely curious if they will have the same experience that he does. The text thus attempts to forge an intimate connection between its implied audience and its model author.

Patrul, the historical author of the text, would be familiar with the authorial strategy of calling attention to one's (apparent) feelings within one's practice instructions. Śāntideva, one of Patrul's most beloved role models, used this very technique in the opening of the fourth chapter of his *Bodhicāryāvatāra*. There, in verses four and six, Śāntideva asks himself what will become of him if he abandons his vow to help other beings.<sup>291</sup> Śāntideva thereby shares his own self-doubt with his audience, potentially allowing his audience members to more easily identify with him. *The Discourse*, by acknowledging its author's emotions, aspires to achieve a similar effect.

## Conclusion

*The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* mobilizes a series of traditional themes and tropes (renunciation and degenerate age rhetoric, the valorization of the solitary life, the identification of a singularly essential practice, and the use of refrains) to configure its audience's emotional investment in the path of self-development, with particular focus on the *maṇi* mantra. The success of its strategies relies on the proper staging of these tropes, allowing the implied audience to move through the experience of hopelessness to hope, to comfort and confidence in the accessibility of the path to

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<sup>291</sup> Shantideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 54-55; The Tibetan for verses 4-6 reads as follows in the Sde dge edition of the Bstan 'gyur (the most likely edition for Patrul to have used): *gal te de ltar dam bcas nas/ las kyis bsgrub pa ma byas na/ sems can de dag kun bslus pas/ bdag gi 'gro ba ci 'drar 'gyur/ dngos po phal pa cung zad la'ang/ yid kyis sbyin par bsam byas nas/ mi gang sbyin par mi byed pa/ de yang yi dags 'gyur gsungs na/ bla na med pa'i bde ba la/ bsam pa thag pas mgon gnyer nas/ 'gro ba thams cad bslu byas na/ bde 'gror ji ga 'gro 'gyur ram/ Zhi ba lha, Spyod pa la 'jug pa*, 15.

liberation, exemplified by the *maṇi*. It applies a series of literary and rhetorical devices, ranging from tone, to displays of mastery and control, to reflexive references to its own author's feelings.

As we will explore in the next chapter, another of Patrul's compositions uses some of the same techniques, including the singularity trope and bold displays of mastery and control over overlapping lists and categories, to new ends. Chapter 3 will also offer us the opportunity to deepen our exploration of the function of reflexivity in Patrul's life-advice works and its relationship to Patrul's efforts to establish his authority as a trustworthy transmitter of practice instructions.



### Chapter 3: The Singular—Reflexivity of Form & Content

As I argued in chapter 1, Patrul Rinpoche's advice compositions predominantly concern themselves with transmitting essential instructions (*gnad*) and are heavily populated with statements about singular (*gcig po*) teachings, the essence (*ngo bo*) of the path, and myriad practices gathered and condensed (*'dus pa*) into one. In chapter 2, we saw how one of Patrul's better known advice compositions focuses on one such essential practice: the chanting of the *maṇi* (*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*). Patrul structures the work so as to configure his implied audience's affective investment in this practice, guiding his audience on an emotional path from hopelessness to hope to comfort and confidence. To lend credibility to his presentation, Patrul uses a number of methods, including reflexively calling attention to himself as the author of the work, theoretically establishing common ground with his audience.

In the following chapter, we will analyze another example of a rhetorically sensitive advice composition entitled *A Treatise on Dharmic and Worldly Knowledge: The Discourse of an Outcast Sage* (*Chos dang 'jig rten shes pa'i bstan bcos gdol pa'i drang srong gi gtam*).<sup>292</sup> Like *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, this work delivers instructions about essential, singular, potent practices. Its techniques for working on its implied audience are quite different, however. In this case, the work not only teaches about essential practices, but also shows how they all can be condensed down to a common, simple, core practice. In so doing, it exhibits a second way in which Patrul's advice writings are reflexive. Not only do these works call attention to their

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<sup>292</sup> This composition can be found in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 272-289.

own author (as does *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*), but they also employ structures that mirror their own content. *The Discourse of an Outcast Sage* is not only a teaching about singular practices, but it is a self-consciously performative demonstration of what it means for singular practices to be singularly essential.

### **The Content of *The Discourse of an Outcast Sage***

As the text itself asserts, its teachings represent a condensation of Buddhist categories down to the most essential points of practice.<sup>293</sup> In fact, the text supplies teachings about multiple different, singularly potent practices. At different moments in the text, it extols the unique power of devotion to one's guru, of repeatedly looking at one's own mind, and of achieving mindfulness. So, for example, it exclaims that devotion is the “singular, sufficient, pure” remedy (*dkar po gcig thub*), meaning that it is a practice with unique potency.<sup>294</sup> But it earlier identifies looking at one's own mind (*sems la blta*)—a technique for knowing the true nature of one's own mind—as the key to achieving enlightenment.<sup>295</sup> Finally, near its conclusion, it states that mindfulness (*dran pa*) is the root of the dharma.<sup>296</sup>

These statements are not necessarily contradictory. There is a close relationship between what the text calls mindfulness practice (*dran pa*) and the meditative discipline of repeatedly looking at one's own mind (*rang gi sems la lta*). As we will come to see, it also establishes an explicit relationship between the activities of

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<sup>293</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 275: *da dung lag len gnad du dril ba*.

<sup>294</sup> For a study of the rhetoric of *dkar po gcig thub* and the controversy surrounding Tibetan methods of *dkar po gcig thub* practice (in the *Bka' brgyud* lineage), see Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*. For Sapan's critiques of Gampopa (Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079-1153), Lama Zhang (Zhang tshal pa Brtson 'grus grags pa, 1122-1193), and the “singly efficacious white [remedy]” (*dkar po gcig thub*) method of introducing students to the empty nature of their own minds, also see Yamamoto, “Vision and Violence,” chapter 2.

<sup>295</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 276-7.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 288: *dran pa chos kun rtsa ba yin*.

generating devotion for one's guru and looking at one's own mind. Still, how can a short text of eighteen pages so boldly claim that multiple different practices are singularly essential?

The text's inconsistency about what is the most essential and singular practice signals to us that there is more at stake than simply articulating a normative claim about which self-development practices are most important. Were the composition primarily interested in making such a statement, it would make no sense to complicate things by making inconsistent claims. As I will show, the exposition of such singular practices is quite complex, involving seeming detours and shifting vocabulary.

So why does a work that claims to be simplifying the Buddha's teachings provide so many alternatives? Why does it get so complex? There is an ongoing tension in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* between the Buddhist path in its simplest articulations and the path as a complex mix of overlapping categories, schemes, and techniques. This tension manifests in the exposition: it at once gathers together different practices to show their ultimate unity and proliferates a diverse set of instructions about varying topics. *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* thereby exhibits both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It explicitly establishes the agenda of identifying the singular essence of the Buddha's teachings—pushing diverse teachings towards a common center—yet continually introduces new vocabulary and new topics—effectively expanding outwards.

Before exploring why Patrul would choose to structure his work this way, it would be instructive to explain in more detail exactly how *The Discourse of the Outcast*

*Sage* works. Exploring the mechanics of its exposition, in detail, will facilitate an understanding of the potential strategic benefits of such an approach.

### **Patrul's "Condensation Strategy"**

The singular, essential practice is both the content of the composition—the thing that is being taught—as well as a rhetorical device within the composition—a strategy for delivering its teachings. The interface of these two elements—subject matter and rhetoric, content and form—is the interest of this chapter. I will call this method of persuasion Patrul's "condensation" strategy. The activity of consolidating, or gathering things together in a single place, is suggested by the Tibetan verb "du-ba" (*bsdus pa*), a verb ubiquitous in Patrul's advice compositions. "Explain how each of the three is encompassed in one!" an interlocutor asks Patrul in the text, for example.<sup>297</sup> What I am calling Patrul's condensation strategy is his decision to organize his teaching around answering questions like this one.

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* is thus structured around explaining how diverse ideas and practices can be reduced to, or condensed down to a singular phenomenon. Patrul's condensation strategy is, simultaneously, a strategy for proliferating discourse. By claiming to simplify matters, by showing how a numbers of categories can be reduced to a single category, the work actually expands. In the course of showing how many phenomena can be reduced to a singular one, it creates space to say all sorts of things about the phenomena in question. In the process of putatively simplifying things, the composition actually communicates a whole wealth of new material. For this reason, Patrul's "condensation" strategy is actually a proliferative strategy.

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 277: *gsum re'ang gcig tu bsdus la shod/*

*The Discourse of an Outcast Sage* organizes itself around two sets of questions posed to a hermit-sage (*drang srong*), who the text tells us is skilled in giving advice. The sage's responses to these two sets of questions make up the entire body of the versified treatise. In each case, the sage responds to broad questions posed about large Buddhist categories such as "dharma" and "the three jewels." By way of answering these questions, he verbally enacts a series of substitutions and equations ultimately reducing all of the categories at play to one single, essential phenomenon.

The first set of questions inquires into the meaning of "dharma" (the Buddha's teachings) and "method" (Tibetan *chos* and *lugs*, respectively).<sup>298</sup> The sage responds, in verse, with a series of divisions and definitions. Slowly, over the course of some five pages of verse, the sage succeeds in reducing all of the components of dharma and method, including *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, virtuous and unvirtuous deeds, to a singular phenomenon: one's own mind.<sup>299</sup> The entirety of the Buddha's teachings therefore amount to one single project—the disciplining of one's mind (*rang sems 'dul ba*).<sup>300</sup>

The text's decision to analyze these categories of dharma and method entails some punning. The compound *chos lugs*, taken together, means "dharma lineage" and signifies a sectarian affiliation. One could therefore interpret the first set of questions asked to the sage as relating to lineages:

What are dharma lineages? How do you divide the dharma lineages?  
Which dharma lineages should be rejected? Which dharma lineages should be accepted?<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> The decision to translate the term *lugs* as "method" will be addressed below.

<sup>299</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 277: *rang gi sems la tshang*.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 277: *rang sems 'dul ba sangs rgyas bstan pa yin*.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 272: *chos dang lugs zhes bya ba ci/ chos dang lugs kyi dbye ba gang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag spang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag blang/*

The Tibetan text, however, places an “and” between the terms dharma (*chos*) and method (*lugs*). Literally, the questions therefore read as:

What are dharma and method? How do you divide dharma and method?  
What of dharma and method should be rejected? What of dharma and method  
should be accepted?<sup>302</sup>

The sage’s answers to these questions, which ultimately lead to him advocating disciplining one’s mind, entirely ignore the implication of dharma lineages. This is why I translate the multivalent term *lugs* as “method.” The translation “method” best fits the interpretation offered in the sage’s response.

The story of a sage ignoring his visitor’s questions about his sectarian affiliation should be a familiar one to contemporary Tibetans, however. As I discussed in chapter 1, Gene Smith recounts a humorous story of Patrul refusing to answer similar questions, even going so far as to expose himself, showing his penis (Tib: *gsang mtshan*) when asked to give his tantric name (also Tib: *gsang mtshan*) which would give away his lineage affiliation. In another of Patrul’s works, a character, when asked for his lineage affiliation, simply identifies himself as a student of the Buddha’s.<sup>303</sup> In both of these stories, a character plays dumb in response to questions about his sectarian affiliation. Perhaps, then, Patrul (the historical author) is applying the same strategy here, in the *Discourse of the Outcast Sage*: having the sage “play dumb” by ignoring any implication of sectarian affiliation in the interlocutor’s question and explaining how all of the Buddha’s teachings amount to the same thing. According to this reading, Patrul’s condensation work has an ecumenical flavor to it. While there may be many methods

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 272: *chos dang lugs zhes bya ba ci/ chos dang lugs kyi dbye ba gang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag spang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag blang/*

<sup>303</sup> See Patrul’s *Gzhon nu blo ldan gyi dri lan*, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

of practice, the work might suggest, all techniques ultimately amount to the same thing.

While such a reading is intriguing, this chapter argues that the composition is ultimately about inspiring confidence in certain self-development practices, and in the teacher who is delivering these practices. While the composition may well carry a hidden “non-sectarian” message, such a message is by no means the only thing happening of interest in the work. It would be a mistake to reduce the complex machinations at play in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* to this ecumenical statement.

The majority of the work follows from the sage’s answers to a second set of questions. The sage’s interlocutor asks him to condense the teachings of the three jewels or objects of refuge (Tib: *skyabs gsum*; the *buddha*, *dharma*, *saṅgha*), the three vows (Tib: *sdom pa gsum*; the vow for individual liberation, the vow to bring about the liberation of all beings, and the secret mantra, or tantric vow), and the three vehicles (Tib: *theg gsum*; the lesser vehicle, greater vehicle, and adamantine vehicle) into one singular meaning. After some particularly complex divisions and substitutions, the sage succeeds in explaining how all three sets of three—refuges, vows, and vehicles—most essentially refer to the singular practice of subduing all phenomena by recognizing their singular nature.

The text’s expository structure is therefore directed at taking broad categories and reducing them to a specific, essential point of practice. In its first presentation, the sage reduces the categories of dharma and method to the technique of disciplining one’s mind by means of continually looking at one’s mind in meditation. In the second

demonstration, he contracts the sets of refuges, vows and vehicles down to the method of subduing one's mind (and thereby all phenomena) by recognizing the mind's nature.

A few examples will show how these grand reductions actually entail the proliferation of teachings. Rather than merely simplifying things, the demonstrations of how myriad things are reducible to one actually serve to justify various substantive detours. These seeming digressions also produce a productive tension in the text, one that will be explored later in the chapter.

In the course of explaining the meaning of “dharma” (Tib: *chos*), which the text equates with all knowable things, the sage further delineates two possible categories of things: ones belonging to the cycle of suffering (Tib: *'khor ba*) and those belonging to liberation from suffering (Tib: *mya ngan 'das pa*).<sup>304</sup> Within the category of *saṃsāra*, he makes a further set of divisions pertaining to four patterns of ethical activity, two bad and two good. The four are as follows:

- 1) Exceedingly “crooked” actions (*shin tu 'khyog po*), which entail purposefully harming others, that land their agents in hell in a future rebirth.
- 2) Degenerate activities, marked by dishonesty, which are the norm for most people in contemporary, immoral society.
- 3) People's dharma (*mi chos*), constituted by honesty in one's actions.
- 4) Divine dharma (*lha chos*), marked by a total absence of desire in one's actions.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 272-3.

<sup>305</sup> Patrul does not, in this context, suggest that *lha chos* is *buddha-dharma* (activity that directly leads to the liberation from suffering). Here, *lha chos* seems to mean activity that leads to rebirth in a divine realm. In contrast, Patrul's *Lugs zung tshogs gtam gyi lhan thabs rin chen phra tshom* juxtaposes *'jig rten mi chos* (wordly people's *dharma*) with *dam pa chos* (the true *dharma*), rather than with *lha chos*. In the latter context, *mi chos* is thereby opposed to the *dharma* that leads to liberation. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 326-7.



The sage relates these four paths to their karmic outcomes: bad rebirths for the first two paths, good rebirths for the latter two. So while the world of *saṃsāra* entails practices that do not lead directly to one's liberation from suffering, there are nonetheless better and worse ethical options available, ethical options that one should accept and those that one should reject.

The text's brief excursus on worldly ethics is a good example of how its condensation strategy can lead to a proliferation of teaching. While in the process of putatively *reducing* phenomena to a single object, the text nonetheless fits in an entire ethical discourse on the importance of honesty in one's worldly endeavors. Within the larger pattern of condensation, it finds the space to proliferate teachings, introducing new categories (four ethical paths) and new ethical ideals (honesty in one's actions). While the sage may structure his response to the first set of questions as a process of moving from broad categories to one single practice, in actuality his "reduction" entails introducing numerous new categories and ideas, such as distinctions between honest and crooked actions, and between people's dharma and divine dharma. The text's condensation strategy is simultaneously a proliferative strategy. In the service of simplification, we get complexity.

The sage's response to the second set of questions from his interlocutor, where he is explicitly asked to condense the multiplicity of Buddhist objects of refuge, vows, and vehicles into a single essence, also features notable diversions. His first move is to equate the three objects of refuge with one's guru. In the single person of one's guru, he explains, one finds all three objects. The mind of one's guru is no different than the Buddha, the speech of one's guru is no different than the dharma, and the body of the

Buddha is no different than the *saṅgha* (explained as the community of practitioners that constitute the three vehicles).

The move to equate the three objects of refuge with the guru is part of a larger process that leads to the conclusion that the objects of refuge, vows, and vehicles all amount to subduing the mind by realizing its true nature. Along the way, the sage takes full advantage of the opportunity to speak about the guru. He delivers verses extolling the enlightened nature of gurus; he provides a series of metaphors to show how all gurus are alike; he differentiates between the positive qualities that define a guru and the negative qualities that do not; finally, he offers a celebration of the power of devotion (Tib: *mos gus*) to the guru.<sup>306</sup>

As was the case with his teachings about worldly ethics, the sage's various poetic excursions on the guru show us how Patrul's condensation strategy creates a discursive space for new teachings. From the perspective of the larger arc of the composition, "the guru" is but one stop on the road to the singular practice of recognizing the nature of one's mind. Still, the text takes full advantage of this discursive rest stop, delivering dozens of witty verses about qualities of a guru and the benefits of earnestly following one. Under the guise of simplification, the text in fact propagates additional teachings.

### **The Mechanisms of Condensation**

In broad strokes, the sage performs two condensations that both conclude with him advocating the practice of disciplining one's own mind (by directly looking at its

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<sup>306</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 282-5.

empty nature). The actual process of getting to this advocated practice is quite intricate, however.

In my analysis, the text employs five different modes of substitution and condensation. A description of these five will familiarize us with the mechanics of Patrul's condensation strategy, preparing us to hypothesize about the desired function of this discursive mechanism. The five modes are as follows:

- 1) **Substitution based on common enumeration.** For example, the sage relates the three-fold scheme of "body-speech-mind" to the three-fold scheme of "*buddha-dharma-saṅgha*."
- (2) **Condensation based on common ground.** For example, the sage notes that the three vows that Buddhists take all entail rejecting something.
- (3) **Simplification based on a process.** Here, the sage lays out a temporal process, whereby a practitioner moves from one set of techniques to another, concluding with a single, most essential practice.
- (4) **Ontological substitution.** In one instance, the sage moves from one category to another because of the indivisibility of their ultimate nature.
- (5) **Metaphorical condensation.** Here, the sage uses a metaphor to show how two distinct practices compliment each other.

### **Substitution based on common enumeration**

The substitution based on common enumeration works in the following way. In one example, the sage desires to show how all three jewels (the Buddha as enlightened figure, the dharma as his teachings, and the *saṅgha* as his community of followers) are found in one's guru. Patrul's strategy is to relate the three-fold category of *buddha-*

*dharma-saṅgha* to the threefold category of body-speech-mind. The traditional division of body-speech-mind captures the different kinds of activity possible by a single human being. If the sage can show how *buddha-dharma-saṅgha* is equivalent to body-speech-mind, he will have shown three seemingly dissimilar types of things (*buddha-dharma-saṅgha*) to be co-present in a single entity (a human being).

He does so by appealing to three intermediate categories of three. The first proposition is that one's guru is enlightened.<sup>307</sup> As such, one's guru's mind manifests as the three enlightened bodies of a Buddha (Skt: *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, *nirmānakāya*; Tib: *chos sku*, *longs sku*, *sprul sku*).<sup>308</sup> In the sense that one's guru's mind manifests the qualities of a Buddha, the category of Buddha (from the three objects of refuge) is thus present in the guru. One's guru's mind is Buddha.

The sage's next argument is to establish that when the guru teaches, he teaches the dharma. He explains that when the guru teaches, he essentially teaches the content of the three baskets (Skt: *vinaya*, *sūtra*, *abhidharma*; Tib: '*dul ba*, *mdo*, *mngon chos*). By teaching how to subdue negative emotions, the guru is teaching the *vinaya* (or the rules for monks); by teaching the essential meaning of all phenomena, the guru is teaching *sūtra*; by teaching about the ontological status of the nature of phenomena, the guru is teaching *abhidharma*. These three statements each entail a play on words, as the sage integrates the Tibetan terms for the three baskets into his descriptions of the guru's teachings: "subduing" ('*dul ba*) negative emotions, "briefly" (*mdo ru*) teaching the essential meaning of phenomena, and "concretely" (*mngon du*) showing the

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 279-80: *bla ma'i thugs ni sangs rgyas yin/*

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 279: *chos sku'i dbyings na dbyer med cing/ longs sku bskyed rdzogs zung du 'jug/ sprul sku'i thugs rjes 'gro la dgongs/*

ontological status of the nature of phenomena.<sup>309</sup> Because the guru teaches the content of the dharma (the three baskets), his speech is *dharma*.<sup>310</sup>

As for the guru's body, it itself constitutes the community (*saṅgha*) of the three vehicles to liberation. The guru acts in accordance with the "hearers" (the practitioners of the *śrāvaka* vehicle) by pacifying and subduing negative emotions, he acts in accordance with the *bodhisattvas* (the practitioners of the *mahāyāna* vehicle) by acting to benefit others, and his body, by metaphorically housing the *dākas* and *dākinīs* (a reference to the mechanisms of tantric subtle body yoga), acts in accordance with the practitioners of the *vajrayāna* (adamantine vehicle).<sup>311</sup> In so far as the activity of the guru's body is in accordance with the activity of the practitioners of the three vehicles, it is itself the *saṅgha*.<sup>312</sup>

The text's strategy in moving from the three jewels (*buddha-dharma-saṅgha*) to the one guru is one of aligning categories of three. Three jewels are comparable to three elements of human beings: body, speech, and mind. Each of these elements, mind-*buddha*, speech-*dharma*, body-*saṅgha*, encapsulates another group of three: three enlightened-bodies, three baskets of teachings, three vehicles of practice. The text thus lines up three sets of three.

The technique of layering enumerated categories on top of each other and equating them in some fashion is an old technique in Buddhist intellectual history. As discussed in chapter 2, Buddhist preaching has long entailed the use of enumerated

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 280: *nyon mongs 'dul ba gtsor byas nas/ chos kun gnad don mdo ru bsdus/ chos nyid gnas lugs mngon du ston/*

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 280: *bla ma'i gsung ni sde snod chos/*

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 280: *nyan thos tshul du zhi zhing dul/ byang sems tshul du gzhan phan spyod/ dpa' bo dpa' mo'i grong khyer phyir . . .*

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 280: *sku ni theg gsum dge 'dun no.*

lists (*māṭṛika*), to move from one set of categories to another.<sup>313</sup> The sage's equations between categories of equal number also recalls Tantric texts and their frequent technique of identifying five buddhas with five directions, five colors, five ritual implements, five emotions, five wisdoms, and so on.<sup>314</sup>

Having aligned his respective categories of three, the sage then concludes that the singular guru encapsulates all three of the jewels.<sup>315</sup> This statement is a particularly clear rendition of the singularity trope. He recognizes the guru to be a singular phenomenon ("the lama alone," Tib: *bla ma nyag gcig*), and claims that this phenomenon encapsulates a multiplicity of things ("gathers together all of the jewels," Tib: *dkon mchog kun 'dus pa*).

### **Condensation based on common ground**

The text's second procedure is to reduce a multiplicity to a singularity by establishing a common element undergirding the seemingly dissimilar elements. For example, the sage explains that all three vows that a Tibetan Buddhist takes entail rejecting mistaken mental-conceptualizations. As the sage explains, the renunciatory vow (Tib: *nges 'byung*) that leads to liberation for the individual (Tib: *so sor thar*) is really about rejecting views, such as the view of things being pure (Tib: *gtsang ba*), things being pleasurable (Tib: *bde ba*), and things having a permanent self (Tib: *bdag rtag pa*). The vow to pursue personal liberation is therefore a vow to reject false views.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> See Rupert Getzin, "The Māṭikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List."

<sup>314</sup> For a convenient map of such identifications, see "The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art" online exhibition, available via the Huntington Archive at Ohio State University, last visited February 12, 2012, <http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/Exhibitions/CircleofBliss/exhibition.html>. In this rendering, the Buddha Akṣobhya is identified with the East, with the color blue, with the ritual implement of the vajra, and with the emotion of anger, for example.

<sup>315</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 280: *de slad bla ma nyag gcig dkon mchog kun 'dus pa*.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 278, 280.

The vow to help others, which amounts to the *bodhisattva* vow, is also about rejecting false views. In this case, the vow entails overcoming the tendency to cherish oneself, not to value others, and to focus on one's own needs. By rejecting such mistaken mental habits, one achieves the mind of awakening (Skt: *bodhicitta*, Tib: *byang chub sems*), which is the goal of the vow to help others.<sup>317</sup>

Finally, the sage states that the secret-mantra vow (the vow that enables one to practice the adamantine vehicle) is equivalent to inculcating “pure vision” (Tib: *dag snang*),<sup>318</sup> a way of looking at the world that sees the liberated-nature in all things (as opposed to seeing them as they appear to us). Pure vision, according to the sage, entails rejecting another set of false mental conceptualizations. One must reject the tendency to become attached to ordinary appearances, to sublime (Tib: *gya nom pa*) appearances, or to the apparent characteristics (Tib: *mtshan ma*) of things at all. Taking the tantric vow is therefore also about rejecting mistaken mental activity—the false attachment to things as they appear to us.

The sage thus begins with three different vows—vows that are prerequisites for three seemingly different modes of Buddhist practice: the pursuit of individual liberation, the pursuit of liberation for all by dedicating oneself to helping others, and the pursuit of liberation through the transformation of one's perceptions (tantric practice). Yet the sage identifies a common ground in all three of these vows. They all entail abandoning mistaken conceptualization (Tib: *rnam rtog spong ba*). The single practice of eliminating mental errors thereby grounds all of the vows.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 278, 280.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 280–281: *rnam rtog med 'dir sdom gsum kun 'dus rnam par dag cing 'jug pa ste/*

## Simplification based on a process

In this form of condensation rhetoric, the text does not eliminate multiple categories in favor of a single one. Rather, it shows how all of the practices lead to the same result. Over the course of the first six pages of the work, for example, the sage introduces different modes of training in order. By following the worldly ethics (Tib: *'jig rten chos*), or the ethics applicable to the cycle of suffering (Tib: *'khor ba'i chos*), one learns to act honestly (Tib: *drang po'i spyod*). After living in such a way, one next pursues liberation.<sup>320</sup>

In order to reach the goal of liberation, there are further steps. First, one learns the content of the teachings, as represented by the three baskets. Then one engages in practice, as represented by the traditional categories of the three trainings: discipline, concentration, and insight (Skt: *śīla, samādhi, prajñā*; Tib: *tshul khrims, ting nge 'dzin, shes rab*). Yet, the sage emphasizes, one must internalize (Tib: *nang du bsgrub*) these teachings and practices. This step of internalization, entailing understanding the meaning of even one word and generating even one single moment of virtue, is what constitutes the singular practice to which Patrul has been building: disciplining one's mind (Tib: *sems 'dul*).<sup>321</sup>

In this form of condensation, the text establishes the singular importance of disciplining the mind. It does so by defining this practice as the culmination of many other steps: learning to live honestly in the world of suffering, studying Buddhist texts and practicing Buddhist trainings, and internalizing the meaning of these texts and

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 274: *de ltar 'khor ba'i chos la spang blang dag/ shes nas drang po'i spyod la gnas pa des/ yang dag mya ngan 'das pa thob bya ba/ . . .*

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 274-5.



trainings. The singular practice of disciplining the mind does not explicitly contain the other exercises, but rather serves as their culmination.

### Ontological substitution

This fourth mechanism within the text's larger condensations is the most explicitly philosophical of the modes. In one case, the sage states that one's own mind and the mind of one's guru are ultimately not different. After one realizes the nature of one's mind (Tib: *sems kyi chos nyid*), he suggests that one should recognize one's mind to be "mixed" (Tib: *yid 'dres*) with one's guru's mind.<sup>322</sup> He points out that your mind contains the three jewels (*buddha-dharma-saṅgha*), as was the case with one's guru's mind. Later, he states even more clearly that the nature of one's mind and the nature of one's guru's mind are not different.<sup>323</sup> The sage's substitution of one's guru's mind for one's own is therefore justified by the common ontological status of each respective "mind."

With that said, the sage's appeal to the experience of "mixing" one's guru's mind with one's own also builds on the implied intimacy shared between a teacher and his student. As we find in Nyingma instructions on how to recognize one's mind's true nature, there is a cultural understanding that a practitioner is entirely dependent on his guru in order to receive "pointing out instructions," pedagogical techniques tailored to a student that allow him to see his mind for what it is. Patrul's own *Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King* (*Mkhas pa shrī rgyal po'i khyad chos*) offers examples of such instructions.<sup>324</sup> The description of mixing one's mind with one's guru's mind is

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 281: *sems kyi chos nyid legs rtogs na/ skyabs gsum rang gi sems su shes/ bla ma mchog dang thugs yid 'dres/*

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 282: *chos nyid klong na bla ma'i thugs dang rang gi sems nyid tha mi dad.*

<sup>324</sup> See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 5, 206-225.

therefore a description of a process of coming to terms with one's mind's true nature in dependence on one's guru.

The text's move from the guru's mind to the student's mind is thereby based on two related connections. First, it represents a substitution grounded in the common ontology of the objects in question. Second, it plays on a familiar procedure for coming to profound realization about one's mind.

### **Metaphorical condensation**

Towards the conclusion of *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, the sage draws together distinct threads from his exposition by way of a grand metaphor. As discussed, earlier in the work the sage devotes a few pages to praising the singular power of devotion to one's guru. Towards the end of the work, he likewise extols the potency of mindfulness meditation (Tib: *dran pa*), identifying this technique as the root of all of the methods for subduing one's mind.<sup>325</sup> By way of conclusion, however, the sage chooses to combine these two forms of practice, each of which he has claimed to be of essential value and power.

He does so by describing devotion as the “nose rope” in the hand of one's guru. Here, the metaphor is of one's guru leading you by the reigns, as one might lead cattle.<sup>326</sup> Devotion thus keeps one tethered to one's guru, forcing you to stay the course. Mindfulness, in contrast, is like a stake in the ground (to which a rope can be tied), which prevents you from wandering in distraction.<sup>327</sup> These two techniques, devotion and mindfulness, share the common function of keeping one in the proper

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<sup>325</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, 2003, 288: *sems kyi 'dul thabs thams cad kyi/ rta ba dran pa kho na ste/*

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 288: *mos gus sna thag bla ma'i phyag tu gtod*. Contrast this metaphor with the metaphor of cows wandering astray, as found in the opening chapter of Nagarjuna's *Ratnavali*, a work with which Patrul was certainly familiar.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 288: *dran pa'i rtod phur yengs med gzhi la btab/*

place on the path. The sage extends this metaphor to traveling along the path when he concludes that the fortunate practitioner who has made use of these techniques “rides the great vehicle.”<sup>328</sup>

In this example, the sage thereby brings together different strands of his instructions. He links his teachings on the centrality of the guru and the importance of devotion to him with his multiform descriptions of how one should examine and ultimately discipline one’s mind, all of which have, at their root, the discipline of mindfulness. He makes this connection by way of metaphors about the path (as cattle led by a nose-rope and prevented from wandering by being tethered to a stake, and later as a passenger on the great vehicle).

### **The Arc of Patrul’s Condensation**

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* makes use of at least five different mechanisms of substitution, in order to move from multiple categories to single ones. But how do all of these substitutions, transpositions, and rearrangements work together? What would a map of the text’s condensation exercises look like?

The first condensation demonstration works as follows (see table 1, below). The sage begins by dividing dharma (*chos*) into the phenomena of *saṃsāra* (the world of suffering) and nirvana (the liberation from that suffering) and “method” (*lugs*) into virtuous and unvirtuous deeds. The category of dharma includes all things to be known in the world, which also amounts to all things in the world to either be accepted or rejected. What is to be accepted and what is to be rejected are traditional categories that coincide with the Buddha’s four noble truths: the cessation of suffering and the

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 288: *skye bu mchog de theg chen gzhon pas 'gro/*

path to cessation (truths three and four) are the things to be accepted; suffering and the cause of suffering (truths one and two) are to be rejected. True to this traditional distinction, the sage equates *dharma* with *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. *Saṃsāra* encapsulates all the phenomena in the world that do not pacify suffering (what is to be rejected), whereas *nirvāṇa* encapsulates all the phenomena in the world that do pacify suffering (what is to be accepted). Later in the text, the sage will irrevocably reduce all of the phenomena of *saṃsāra* to one's mind. One's mind, he teaches, is the source of all of one's external actions, whether they are bodily actions or speech actions. One's mind is thereby the singular key to ethical activity within the world of suffering.

*Nirvāṇa* (those things that pacify suffering) is brought about by the teachings of the Buddha. Such teachings can be divided in two, the sage explains, scriptures (Tib: *lung*) and realizations (or practices) (Tib: *rtogs*). These can be further divided, with the scriptures constituted by the three traditional baskets of Buddha's teachings (*sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma*) and the practices constituted by the three traditional trainings of discipline, meditation, and wisdom (*śīla*, *śamādhi*, and *prajñā*). The meaning of the words that appear in the three baskets are what students listen to and reflect upon (Tib: *thos bsam yul*), the first two of the three steps in a traditional Buddhist categorization of proper learning. The three trainings, meanwhile, are what constitute students' meditation practice (Tib: *goms par bya*), the third of the three modes of proper learning.

Having laid out these three sets of three (baskets, trainings, and modes of learning), the sage makes a statement quite typical of Patrul's life-advice. He explains that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to learn everything in the three baskets of

Buddhist scripture, nor is it reasonable to try and practice all that is entailed by the three trainings. To follow the Buddha's teaching, rather, all that is necessary is to understand the meaning of one word of the teachings, or to develop a virtuous mind for even one moment.<sup>329</sup> The breadth of teachings and practices to be found in the three baskets and three trainings is less important than internalizing a few of these teachings and practices by applying them to oneself. For this reason, all nine of these categories—the three baskets, the three trainings, and the three steps of learning—are encompassed by a singular practice, that of disciplining one's mind (*sems thul*).

This move is a particularly strong representation of the singularity *topos*. The sage decries the difficulty of attending to all of the teachings and practices that one finds in the Buddhist tradition. In contrast to that multiplicity of practices, he proposes the relative simplicity of a single practice: disciplining one's mind. In fact, all of the Buddha's myriad teachings, all of the teachings that the Buddha spoke and practiced, are superseded by this singular practice, which is sufficient for attaining liberation. "If one disciplines this mind, that is liberation," the sage concludes.<sup>330</sup>

To summarize, the sage performs a massive condensation, reducing all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* to one's own mind, thus making the practice of disciplining one's mind of singular importance. Along the way, he makes strategic divisions that create space for him to deliver teachings about worldly ethics and comment on the relationship between Buddhist scriptures, trainings, and modes of learning.

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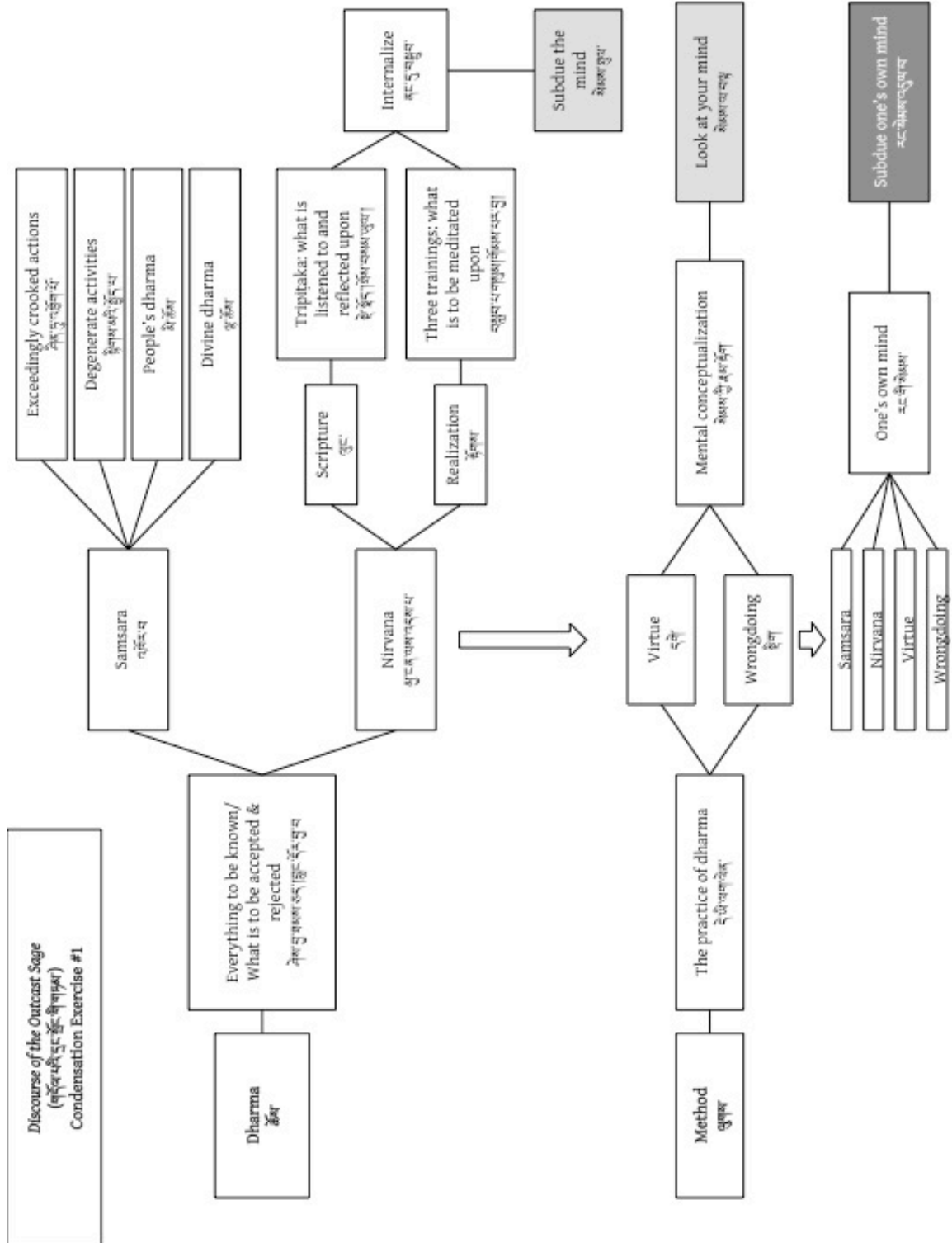
<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 275: *sems 'di thul na mya ngan 'das pa yin*.

*Dharma* is only one half of the equation, however. The sage proceeds by attending to “method” (*lugs*). *Lugs*, he explains, is the practice (*lag len*) of *dharma*. This practice can be further divided into virtuous activities (*dge ba*), activities that do not generate suffering, and non-virtuous activities (*sdig pa*), ones that do generate suffering. As was the case with *dharma*, these virtuous and non-virtuous activities can all be reduced to mind. This is because, as the sage explains, all karmic acts, whether physical acts, speech acts, or thoughts, depend on mental intentions. In other words, body and speech are subsumed by the mind. Since all practice pertains to the mind, the required singular practice is analyzing this mind by “looking” at it (*sems la lta ba*), later equated with disciplining one’s mind.

Thus the sage’s first condensation exercise is complete. All phenomena (*chos*) and their practice (*lugs*) are reducible to one’s mind. The best approach thus amounts to the singular practice of disciplining one’s mind. The text’s “condensation” strategy is an expository strategy for the proliferation of teachings wherein he takes many different categories (*dharma*, method, *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, virtue, non-virtue, the three baskets, three trainings, and the three modes of learning) and reduces them to a singular practice (disciplining the mind). It is thus a device in service of delivering simple, yet essential instructions, a strategy for delivering the *gnad*, the essential point of all teachings.

TABLE 1



The text's second condensation exercise is even more complex than the first (see table 2 and table 3). In this case, the sage's interlocutor challenges him to explicate and essentialize the three tripartite categories of the three jewels, the three vows, and the three vehicles. The sage begins by showing how all three jewels are found in one's guru, as discussed at length earlier. He later suggests that one's guru is not ultimately different from you, as realized when one mixes one's mind with one's guru's mind. The sage thereby moves from the three jewels to one's own mind. Along the way, he also emphasizes the practice of devotion to one's guru—a practice that he returns to at the conclusion of the chapter.

The sage next addresses the three vows—the vow of renunciation, the *bodhisattva* vow to help all other beings become liberated, and the secret vow associated with tantric practice. These vows, as discussed in the analysis of the “common ground” condensation mechanism, all entail rejecting or overcoming mistaken conceptualization (Tib: *rnam rtog spang*).

The three vehicles of the lesser vehicle (Tib: *theg pa sman pa*), the great vehicle (Tib: *theg pa chen po*), and the unexcelled vehicle (Tib: *theg pa bla na med pa*) also share a common root practice, in the sage's telling. They all involve subduing one's mind. The lesser vehicle concerns itself with overcoming the mental affliction of passion by way of teaching selflessness. The great vehicle teaches its practitioners to overcome hatred by instructing them in equanimity. The unexcelled vehicle guides its followers to overcome delusion by teaching them the nonduality of subject and object (the lack of ultimate separation between the mind and those things apprehended by the mind).



These three vehicles are thereby three different methods for overcoming, or subduing, the mind's harmful emotional habits.

The sage later concludes that the underlying functions of the three vows—rejecting mental conceptualizations (Tib: *rnam rtog spang*)—and the underlying practice of the three vehicles—subduing one's own mind (Tib: *rang sems 'dul ba*)—amount to the same thing. Both of these self-development techniques constitute subduing mental conceptualization (Tib: *rnam rtog 'dul ba*). He then advocates a tripartite program for subduing mental conceptualization. One first divides and subdues (Tib: *rnam rtog phyé zhing 'dul*), which entails differentiating positive mental activity (faith, altruistic intention, and wisdom) from negative mental activity (passion, aversion, and delusion). Next, one looks and subdues (Tib: *rnam rtog blta zhing 'dul*), meaning one looks directly at one's own mind until one recognizes its empty and yet radiant nature. Finally, one establishes and subdues one's mental activity (Tib: *bzhag cing 'dul*), which the sage parses as meeting one's mind face to face. So, while the sage effectively condenses the categories of the three vows and three vehicles down to the single approach of “subduing mental conceptualization,” he once again uses this simplifying gesture as an opportunity to proliferate more instructions, namely three different stages of subduing one's mental activity.

The sage actually offers two different syntheses of the three jewels with the three vows and three vehicles. His first synthesis, which appears approximately halfway through his treatment of these categories, interprets all three of these tripartite groups as consequences of the realization of the empty nature of one's mind (Tib: *sems kyi chos nyid rtogs pa*). Once one realizes the nature of one's mind, he teaches,

one will recognize one's mind mixed together with one's guru's mind.<sup>331</sup> Given the sage's equation of the three jewels with the guru, this amounts to realizing the three jewels. Once one realizes the nature of mind, the sage continues, one's thoughts will subside as they arise.<sup>332</sup> This is the culmination of the abandoning of one's mental conceptualization (Tib: *rnam rtog spang*) associated with the three vows. Finally, once one realizes the nature of one's mind, all things appearing to one's mind, as well as one's mind itself, will come under one's control.<sup>333</sup> This accomplishment relates back to the text's characterization of the three vehicles as processes for subduing one's own mind (Tib: *rang sems 'dul ba*). So, in this mid-exposition rendition of the three jewels, three vows, and three vehicles, the sage identifies the practice of realizing the empty nature of one's own mind as the secret key to all three.

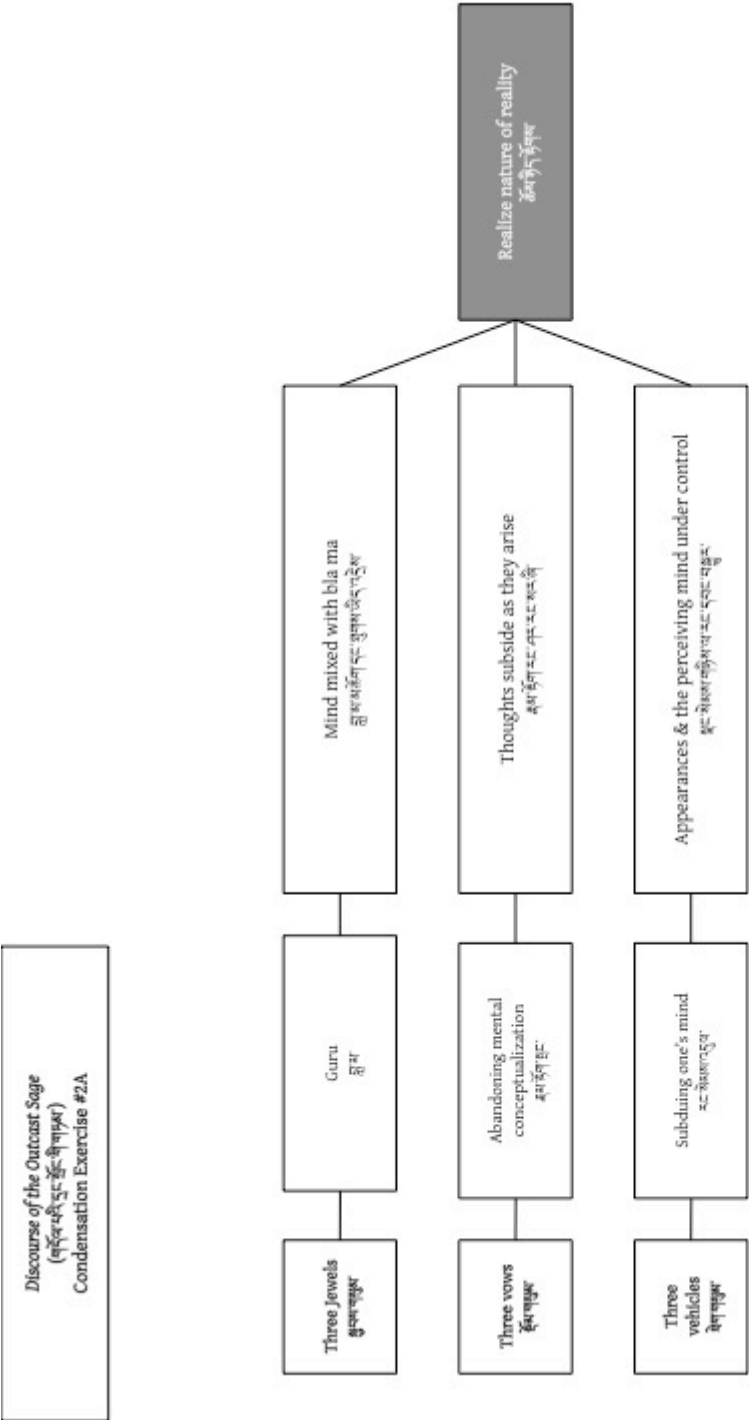
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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 281: *sems kyi chos nyid legs rtogs na/ rnam rtog rang shar rang sar zhi/*

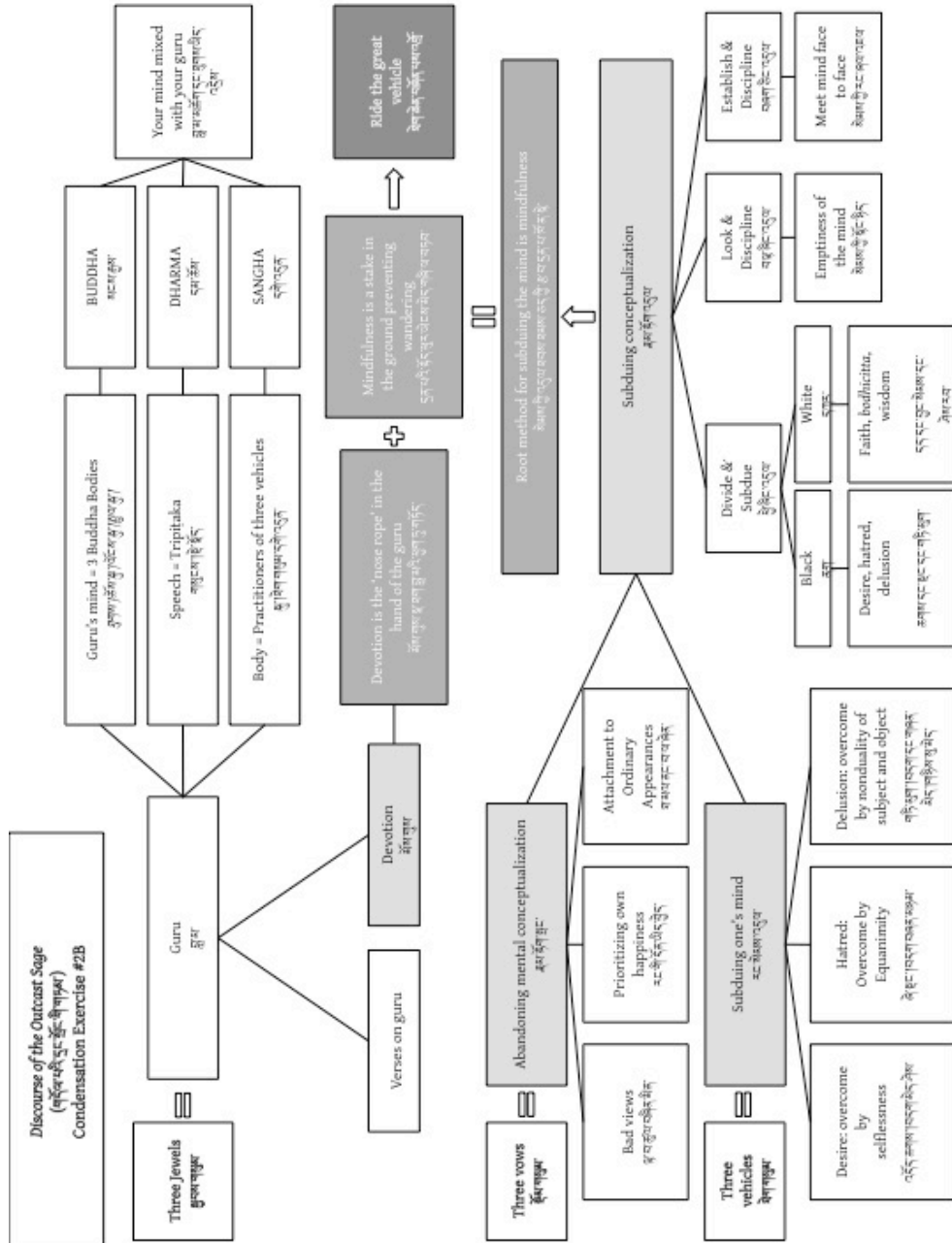
<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 281: *sems kyi chos nyi legs rtogs na/ snang sems gnyis la rang dbang bsgyur/*

TABLE 2



The sage's second synthesis comes at the end of the text. It concerns the condensation by metaphor exercise that we discussed earlier. On the one hand, he has the singular practice of devotion to one's guru stand in for the three jewels. On the other hand, he identifies the discipline of mindfulness (Tib: *dran pa*) as the root of the practice of subduing mental conceptualization (Tib: *rnam rtog 'dul ba*), which, as we've discussed earlier, is the essential practice underlying both the three vows and the three vehicles. The sage then categorizes these two essential practices of devotion (metaphorically the nose-rope in the hand of the guru) and mindfulness (metaphorically the stake in the ground) as things that keep you from wandering off of the path, before you eventually come to ride (Tib: *bzhon pas 'gro*) the great vehicle. (See chart on the next page).

TABLE 3



## Singular Practice, Potent Practice

One might wonder, if Patrul (the historical author) is so committed to identifying singularly essential cultivation practices, such as devotion and mindfulness, why not just compose works that state what they are in as simple a way as possible? What is the need for Patrul's diverse life-advice compositions and their complex modes of exposition? As the preceding explication of *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage's* condensation exercises has surely shown, the structure of the work is anything but simple.

In my analysis, the work's application of the *topos* of the singular, through the "condensation" strategy, has everything to do with generating an active investment in the potency of the singular practice. For example, in the second half of the *Discourse of an Outcast Sage*, the sage explains how the three objects of refuge—*buddha*, *dharma*, and *saṅgha*—are all present in one's guru. By doing so, the text challenges its audience to imagine their own guru anew. The very logic of the condensation exercise is one of fitting disparate categories into single phenomena. A careful reader, or active listener, would be forced to visualize in the mind's eye their guru's mind as a Buddha's mind, their guru's speech as the Buddha's teachings, and their guru's bodily actions as manifestations of the enlightened community. The discursive condensation exercise thereby aspires to provoke its implied audience to carry out a mental exercise. It does so by bringing about a new object of imagination for its audience. In the context of the composition, the guru is no longer just a human being, but is now an idea to be imagined: guru as the embodiment of *buddha-dharma-saṅgha*.

The reduction of the three jewels to the guru feeds into the subsequent discussion of the importance of guru devotion (Tib: *mos gus*). Because the imagined-guru encompasses all three jewels, devotion to the guru brings with it all of the benefits that would normally accompany devotion to the three jewels. It is the concentrated potency of the guru, no longer just a human being but now a condensed embodiment of all three jewels, that infuses the singular practice of devotion with such strength. So, logically, the text repeatedly praises the potency of this practice. It declares devotion to be the “singular, sufficient, pure” remedy (*dkar po gcig thub*). Devotion is the key that opens the door to all of the *dharma*. It clears away obstacles to practice, subdues demons, and lands one in a pure-realm in the next life, it teaches.<sup>334</sup> The simple practice of devotion to the guru thus becomes a vehicle for accomplishing a wide variety of goals for the practitioner, from subduing demons to landing one in a heavenly rebirth.

The relationship between the mechanics of condensation and the implied potency of the practices that *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* endorses works in other contexts, as well. Because all of *saṃsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, virtuous and unvirtuous actions are contained in the mind, for example, the singular practice of looking at one’s own mind becomes tremendously powerful.<sup>335</sup> By looking at one’s mind, the text explains, one can realize the secret, essential point of the mind, or its true nature. This recognition,

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>335</sup> Thus Patrul speaks of *sems thul*, or disciplining the mind (Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 275) and later *rang gi sems la blta*, “looking at the mind” (ibid., 276). The idea that looking at one’s mind is a singularly powerful, essential practice appears in a number of places in Patrul’s spiritual advice. For example, Patrul states that investigating the mind is the essential point of spiritual advice. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 139.

according to the sage, is tantamount to knowing the nature of *all* of the world's phenomena, and to becoming enlightened.<sup>336</sup>

Following the logic of the exposition, this claim makes perfect sense. Because the mind encompasses all of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, virtue and nonvirtue, investigating one's own mind is equivalent to investigating everything of significance in the world. Investigating one's mind is no longer a solipsistic endeavor, but rather becomes an engagement with the whole world, with the entirety of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The text uses the condensation strategy to imbue the singular practice of looking at one's mind with tremendous potency.

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*'s condensation rhetoric thus invites the attentive audience to generate a certain image of the mind for themselves. This "mind," as an object imagined by the audience, is filled with all of the categories that Patrul has discussed—the body, speech and mind of the guru; the bad views, selfish attitude, and attachment to appearances that are overcome by way of the three vows; and the three poisons counteracted by insights gained in the three vehicles. The imagined "mind" is an entity bubbling with activity, like a pot of boiling water threatening to overflow. The power of this imagined "mind," pregnant with the myriad concepts that Patrul has been discussing, is palpable. The potency of a practice that is capable of taming such a "mind," thereby becomes remarkably attractive.

### **Under What Conditions Might *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* Work?**

In chapter 2, I argued that *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* aspires to configure its audience's emotional investment in the singular practice of

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<sup>336</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 277: *sems la blta ba goms pa na/sems kyi gnad gsang shes 'gyur te/sems kyi gnad gsang shes gyur na/chos rnam kun kyi de nyid shes*.



chanting the *maṇi*. I then proceeded to explore the techniques whereby it established the authority of its model author—efforts that would, in theory, enable the configuration process to work on an audience.

In this chapter, I have described in detail the various mechanisms whereby *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* establishes the potency and centrality of certain practices within the larger scheme of the Buddhist path. The text makes a case for the importance of guru devotion, repeated looking at one's mind, realizing the empty nature of one's mind, and applying the discipline of mindfulness, by challenging its audience to see these practices as encompassing everything of importance in the Buddha's teachings. These practices are essential because they literally contain the entirety of *dharma* and method (*chos* and *lugs*), of the three jewels, three vows, and three vehicles.

What persuasive forces might be at work that would strengthen the implied audience's commitment to these apparently potent practices? One way in which the text's condensation rhetoric is productive is that it challenges its audience to participate in imagining the singularly potent essential points of practices that it seeks to transmit. When the sage enacts his condensations of the three jewels, three vows, and three vehicles to the singular practice of disciplining conceptual thoughts, he compels his audience to follow him through various twists and turns, challenging the audience to follow his substitutions, manipulations, and digressions. Upon reaching the singular practice, the audience has ideally spent significant energy making sense of how the three jewels, three vows, and three vehicles are encompassed by the mind.

These condensation exercises are complex. They entail numerous substitutions and a variety of mechanisms by which different categories and concepts are equated. The sage often refers back to equation made earlier in the work, as well. In order to follow along, the implied audience member therefore has to exert a lot of mental effort. The text's condensation exercises thereby beckon the audience into participating in the condensation process. The audience member who has followed the sage through all of his twists and turns collaborates in the intellectual work of combining, substituting, and essentializing. To simply follow the sage's maze-like exposition is to invest oneself in its outcome. The activity of reading *The Discourse of the Hermit Sage* becomes an investment.

I would thus characterize the text as “productively demanding.” It is demanding in that it involves confusing elisions and substitutions that challenge its audience to keep many different ideas in mind, exhorting the audience to keep track of where the sage is going at all times. It is productive in that the demand that the exposition places on the audience is a way for the composition to work on the audience. Having challenged its audience to find its way out of the maze that the sage has constructed, it rewards its hard-working (if confused) readers at various points in the exposition with simple answers: singular, potent practices such as devotion to the guru and mindfulness meditation. These practices are understandable in their simplicity, in contrast to the confusing whole network of associations that precede them. They are likewise potent, capable in themselves of delivering great payoffs (such as clearing away obstacles to practice, subduing demons, and sending one to a pure-realm).

Given how difficult it is to follow Patrul's substitutions, the audience may also develop a dependence on the sage as a guide through the material. By the time that a reader has made it through (the seventeen pages of) the text, he has come across myriad categories: four approaches to worldly ethics, three baskets of Buddha's teachings, three trainings, the jewels, three bodies of the Buddha, the communities of practitioners, three vows, three manifestations of mental conceptualization to be rejected, three poisonous mental attitudes to be subdued by means of three antidotes, three bad and three good forms of mind, and innumerable formulations of how to look at and discipline one's mind. By this point, the audience is entirely dependent on the sage to make sense of the mess that he has made; for him to clarify the connections between all of the many ideas that he has introduced; for him to reduce his massive proliferation to a digestible essence.

In the face of so many twists and turns, an invested audience member must place her trust in the model author's capacity to bring together in a coherent way the many categories to which he appeals. The text's strategy is thereby to configure the reader's dependence on the author. The expository logic of the composition works on multiple levels at once. To understand the composition, the ideal reader must both invest himself in its outcome and place his trust in the author's capacity to bring together the composition's many strands.

As I noted earlier in the analysis, the expository strategy of the work entails a tension between proliferating a diverse set of instructions about varying topics, on the one hand, and displaying the ultimate unity of these instructions, on the other hand.

The text explicitly acknowledges the tension between its essentializing and proliferative tendencies.

[A work that] makes divisions is a scripture (Tib: *gzhung*).  
[One that] condenses things into their essential point is a pith instruction  
(Tib: *man ngag*).  
Bringing together scripture and pith instruction--  
Know that such speech is the kindness of the guru.<sup>337</sup>

Here, the text identifies two forms of teaching that are present in his life-advice composition: the process of making division (Tib: *rnam par dbye ba*), which I have called proliferation, and the condensing things into their essential point (Tib: *gnad du bsdus pa*), what I have called the “condensation” strategy.

Patrul (the historical author) is clearly aware of his own expository choices. Structuring a work around proliferative and condensatory moves is a decision on his part on how to deliver practice instructions. In my reading, matching these two discursive modalities configures his audience’s investment in the practices that he advocates and in the teacher (the model author) who delivers such teachings. This expository form works on an engaged audience—one that tries to make sense of the substitutions and condensations that Patrul delivers—by demanding it puts forth intellectual effort. It likewise places the audience in dependence on the text’s author to help makes sense of an otherwise overwhelming maze of concepts.

Much like in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End*, the condensation rhetoric of *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* also works to generate a feeling of trust in its author’s authority as a capable transmitter of essential teachings by showing off his mastery over the material. The sage proves himself through his deft manipulation of

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 288: *rnam par dbye ba gzhung yin te/ gnad du bsdus pa man ngag yin/ gzhung dang man ngag kun bsdus nas/ 'di ltar smra shes bla ma'i drin/*

the material. The text thus attempts to instill a sense of confidence in its implied audience that they are in good hands with their guide, the outcast sage.

I would therefore suggest that Patrul's condensation strategy, coupled with the trope of singularly essential practices, invites its implied audience into a dynamic process of building trust and confidence in the skills of the author and in the potency of the practices that it advocates. Essential points of practice, those singularly essential and powerful instructions that are the defining mark of Patrul's life-advice works, are most meaningfully transmitted via the active engagement of both student and teacher. The text's rhetorical logic entails coaxing its unknowing audience into actively imagining these practices as potent ones. It is the audience, who out of their confidence in the trustworthiness of their guide, and out of their efforts to follow his condensations, make possible the confidence in the singularly potency of essential practices. The audience, in interaction with the text, transforms singular exercises into essential ones, simple practices into potent ones.

### **The Reflexive Discourse**

As was the case with *The Discourse of Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* capitalizes on reflexive dynamics in order to work on its audience: configuring audience member's relationships to its advocated practices and to the provider of the instructions alike. In *The Discourse of Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, authorial reflexivity appeared in the form of the text claiming Patrul to have composed (part of) the work for himself, thus offering an opportunity to its audience to establish a feeling of intimacy with the text's model author. Reflexive elements of *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* are more complex. First, the text as a whole functions

reflexively—mirroring content and form in multiple ways. Second, the text again draws attention to the figure of the author in the guise of the character of the outcast sage.

As I have argued, the central items of content in the composition are the singular practices that the sage advocates. These practices, such as devotion to the guru, looking at one's own mind, and maintaining mindful concentration at all times, are singular in so far as each is presented as of essential value. As the sage states, devotion to one's guru is "the single essential point of the thousands of oral explanations."<sup>338</sup> Looking at one's mind (Tib: *sems la blta ba*) is the way to gain knowledge of the secret, essential point of the mind—a knowledge that leads to enlightenment.<sup>339</sup> Mindfulness is the root of the entire *dharmā*.<sup>340</sup>

The expository form of the work mirrors this content in so far as it shows how these practices are singular and essential. Patrul's condensation exercises are, from this perspective, justifications of their essential status. These practices are not merely "essential" in that they can help practitioners achieve their goals. The practices are "essential" in that they are at the core of all of the many categories that Patrul introduces. Devotion to one's guru is essential in that one's guru embodies the three jewels, looking at one's mind is essential in that one's mind is the microcosm of all facets of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and mindfulness is essential in that it is at the root of all instructions about how to subdue mental proliferation (itself the heart of the three vows and three vehicles).

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 285: *mos gus yin te gdams ngag stong gi gnad gcig yin/*

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 277: *sems la blta ba goms pa na/ sems kyi gnad gsang shes 'gyur te/ . . . shes na mya ngan 'das zhes bya.*

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 288: *dran pa chos kun rtsa ba yin/*

Patrul could have delivered instructions on the importance of devotion to one's guru, instructions on looking at one's own mind, and instructions on mindfulness using entirely different forms. In fact, one finds examples in his collected works of instructions on such topics that look nothing like *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*.<sup>341</sup> In this instance, however, Patrul chooses to match his teachings on essential practices with an *essentializing* modality of discourse. His condensation rhetoric, I would argue, is a formal expression of the essential-content of the work.

As Martha Nussbaum argues, texts sometimes make arguments by way of their form—form that is closely aligned with the content of the work. The style of such expositions make arguments that could not be made otherwise, she claims.<sup>342</sup> I suggest that *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* is just such a work. Its expository form—condensation exercises—make arguments about the essential importance and potency of the self-development practices that it advocates. Its condensation rhetoric beckons its audience to imagine its described elements—such as one's guru or one's mind—afresh. Such an imaginal investment in these elements justifies the importance placed on the practices that pertain to these elements. Guru devotion is powerful because the imagined-guru is actually a manifestation of the three jewels. Subduing one's own mind is powerful because one's mind embodies the entire world of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* is thus reflexive in so far as its form reflects its content. It is reflexive in a second sense, as well. The composition's content is reflected in the work that it does on the audience. One of the central themes of the

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<sup>341</sup> For instructions on devotion to the guru, see Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 137-166, 309-332; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 219-273, 498-535. For instructions on looking at one's own mind (for the purposes of gaining familiarity with the nature of mind) see his *Mkhas pa shrī rgyal po'i khyad chos*, found in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 5.

<sup>342</sup> Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 3-4.

work is that one must depend on one's guru in order to succeed on the path. This dependence is not merely stated. The composition also aspires to *generate* a feeling of dependence on one's guru by way of its exposition.<sup>343</sup> As I argued earlier in this chapter, the intricate complexity of the work leads an ideal audience member to develop a feeling of dependence on the model author. Such a reader needs the author (in the character of the sage) to make sense of the maze that he has constructed in his manipulation of the many categories at play in the work. The text thereby both speaks explicitly about dependence and devotion to a teacher and leads its audience to develop feelings of dependence and devotion to the teacher in the text. *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* thus displays reflexivity between content and configured-affect. The directive to devote oneself to one's teacher is doubled by an unspoken attempt by the composition to place its audience into a relationship of devotion to the model author as teacher.

If the composition displays an unspoken aspiration to lead its audience into a relationship with its author, it also features a more explicit effort to frame the audience's relationship with the author. This third form of reflexivity more closely resembles the reflexivity apparent in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End*. Here, however, Patrul (the historical author) is not identified as the progenitor of the teachings. To the contrary, Patrul writes a character into the text who delivers the instructions found therein. This character is, of course, the figure of the "outcast sage."

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<sup>343</sup> This reading takes as its model Anne Monius's "Literary Theory and Moral Vision." In the article, Monius argues that the text in question, the fifth-sixth century Tamil work *Maṇimēkalai*, both portrays the content of compassion and guides its ideal audience into an experience of compassion. The work portrays compassion by describing the heroes of the work responding to others' suffering. The text also aspires to generate a feeling of compassion in the audience by presenting a pitiable situation. An audience sufficiently sensitive to the cues in the text will, in turn, experience a feeling of compassion for the pitiable characters.



*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* portrays its author as a solitary sage who is periodically visited by students who request teachings from him and offers clever responses to their basic questions about the Buddha's teachings. The mechanics of Patrul's self-presentation in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* is instructive. The composition opens by introducing the sage (Tib: *drang srong*, Sanskrit: *ṛṣi*) as someone who resides in Mañjuśrī's palace. These opening verses abound with alliterative allusions to the capacity of divine beings like Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī to subdue the negative forces of the degenerative age.<sup>344</sup> By extension, the sage (*drang srong*), as someone residing in Mañjuśrī's palace, is someone who participates in the activity of subduing the degenerate age.

The very title that Patrul gives to this hero, the "lowly sage" or the "outcast sage" (*gdol pa'i drang srong*), marks this discourse's participation in a broader trope about the degenerate age that appears time and again in Patrul's life-advice compositions, as discussed in chapter 2. As an "outcast," (*gdol pa*), Patrul signals that his hero does not participate in the regular social order. The term that I am translating as "sage" (Tib: *drang srong*) is a common Tibetan translation for Sanskrit *ṛṣi*, a "seer" with supernormal power gained from extensive study or meditation practice. In this case, the outcast seer is portrayed as a renunciant ascetic, living a solitary life in a retreat cave, removed from society, whose only interactions with others are with those who visit him to ask questions. Patrul emphasizes the sage's asocial status when he points out that the sage has no wealth, or anything material to share with his visitors.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 272.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 272: *de la legs par spyod pa med*.

There may be some irony to Patrul's labeling the sage as an "outcast seer." In Indian culture, a *ṛṣi* indicates someone who studies the Vedas. This means that such a person would be a Brahman. In fact, a native Tibetan speaker with whom I read the text mentioned that the term *drang strong* carries the connotation of a Brahman sage. In both Sanskrit (*ṛṣi*) and Tibetan (*drang strong*), then, such a sage indicates a Brahman. But Patrul's sage is no Brahman. He is the opposite of a Brahman, in fact. He is a lowly outcast (Tib: *gdol pa*). Perhaps Patrul is having a bit of fun with his depiction of the sage, then. His sage is one capable of sage-like wisdom and power, despite his low social status.

The term "sage" (*drang strong*) points to another of Patrul's common plays on the degenerate age discourse. Taken literally, the term *drang strong* means "straight one" (the verb *strong ba* meaning to straighten, or by extension to be correct, and the adjective *drang po* meaning straight, or by extension honest). Patrul frequently contrasts those who are straight (*drang po*) with those who are crooked (*'khyog po*) in his discussions of worldly ethics. Just such a discussion appears in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* itself during the sage's discussion of worldly ethics.<sup>346</sup>

Patrul elsewhere offers an etymology of *drang strong* wherein he emphasizes the "straightness" of such a person. For Patrul, *drang* (or *drang po*) signifies honest activity, in contrast to crooked activity. Activity defined as *drang po* is activity consistent with the actor's intentions. There is no deception in such activity. The primary problem in the degenerate present is that no one is honest. People regularly deceive others in

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 273-4.

pursuit of their selfish goals. A *drang srong* is the hero of the degenerate age because he acts differently than all of his contemporaries.<sup>347</sup>

The reference to the sage residing in Mañjuśrī's palace is another example of reflexivity in Patrul's writing. As we discover in the colophon to *The Discourse of an Outcast Sage*, Patrul composed this work while in residence in a cave on the outskirts of Dzogchen monastery. The name of this cave is given as “the palace of skeleton-fang-clenched Mañjuśrī.”<sup>348</sup> So, when the text describes the hero of the text as a sage residing in Mañjuśrī's palace, it is subtly referring to Patrul (the sage) residing in his retreat cave (named after Mañjuśrī). Patrul is taking on the persona of the outcast sage for the purposes of this composition, imagining himself as a powerful sage who spans the precipice between two worlds: the enlightened space of Mañjuśrī's palace—resounding with the sound of the teachings---and the degenerate world of those regular people who approach him with their questions about the Buddha's teachings.

The text's descriptions of the outcast sage, and the sage's subsequent interaction with his visitors, frames *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* as a performance of a skillful teacher. The sage, the text explains, has no material goods to offer. He literally has nothing that is “good to use.”<sup>349</sup> In contrast, he “has good speech.”<sup>350</sup> For that reason, the text continues, everyone asks him things. In response to their requests, he appropriately, or skillfully (*tshul bzhin*) offers them advice.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Also see the opening verses of *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 127.

<sup>348</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 289: *mdo smad kyi mkhas pa chen po shu bham shri zhes bya bas 'jam pa'i dbyangs keng rus mche ba gtsig pa'i phor brang du sbyar ba rdzogs so//*

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 272: *de la legs par spyod pa med na yang/*

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 272: *de la legs par smra ba yod pa ste/*

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 272: *de phyir de la kun gyis don 'dri zhing/ des kyang de la tshul bzhin 'doms par byed/*

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* defines its hero in very specific terms. He is a sage in so much as he is someone who is capable of great words—someone who, in response to the questions of others, skillfully offers advice. To be the sage, to be the protagonist of this composition, means to be someone capable of giving out proper advice. The remainder of the composition then takes the form of the answers that the sage gives to two sets of questions posed to him. *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* thus calls attention to itself as a learned teaching by framing the entire discourse as the production of someone explicitly identified as proficient in giving teachings.

In *the Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, Patrul chooses to be openly reflexive about producing teachings. Patrul could easily have simply begun with questions that he would proceed to answer. In fact, there is a long-standing tradition in Tibet of circulating texts that do just that, called “responses to questions” (Tib: *'dri lan*). Instead, Patrul prefers to cast the model author as a character in the text—one whose defining quality is the capacity to deliver skillful teachings.

To be an author of a life-advice composition in this case—to be someone worthy and capable of delivering such a discourse—is to be someone skilled (Tib: *tshul bzhin*) in answering students’ questions. Such a person need not have an elevated social status. The sage, after all, is a lowly outcast (Tib: *gdol pa*). The author need not possess anything of material worth (Tib: *spyod pa med*). Nor must the author be a part of a normal (human) religious community—he lives alone, after all, in Mañjuśrī’s palace. But the author must be capable of spinning skillful teachings, just as the sage does in his intricate responses to his visitors’ questions.

Significantly, the text frames the sage's teachings as a performance. The questions that the sage answers read very much like challenges to his discursive capacity.

What are *dharma* and method? How do you divide *dharma* and method? What of *dharma* and method should be rejected? What of *dharma* and method should be accepted?<sup>352</sup>

Explain how to condense into one each of the three categories [the three jewels, three vows, and three vehicles]! Show how [each] one can be essentialized into an essential point!<sup>353</sup>

The ascetic's answers to the questions posed to him are performance-like in that they show off his adept facility with the wide range of Buddhist categories to which he appeals.

The text, I would argue, establishes the performance of an eloquent sermon as the criteria by which one can be considered a skilled, even a trustworthy author. The author function within the text is thereby defined by “performativity.” To be an author, according to the rules of the text, is to be someone capable of giving a skillful teaching. The text states this quite clearly, when it identifies the sage as someone whose only meaningful contribution is his capacity to answer questions appropriately, or skillfully (*tshul bzhin*). Having established this expectation about the sage's skill in discourse, however, the text proves that the sage (and by extension the author himself) is capable of such teaching by skillfully answering those questions posed to him.

By structuring the work as a performance of a sage, the text again calls attention to Patrul's own activity as teacher. It draws a parallel between the empirical author of the text (the historical Patrul) and the sage—the skilled character who

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 272: *chos dang lugs zhes bya ba ci/ chos dang lugs kyi dbye ba gang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag spang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag blang/*

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 277: *gsum re'ang gcig tu bsdus la shod/ gcig po'ang gnad du dril la ston/*

appears in the text as the voice of the instructions. The implied audience would thereby draw conclusions about Patrul's skill and facility as a teacher from the performances that constitute the work. By putting on display the sage's, and thereby Patrul's, mastery of diverse Buddhist topics and his talents at getting to the heart of Buddhist teachings, the text thereby aspires to configure its audience's relationship with Patrul the teacher. It endeavors, in my reading, to impress them with the sage's (and Patrul's) erudition and to generate confidence in his capacity to deliver valuable advice instructions. This final form of reflexivity, the authorial reflexivity of a text that refers back to its author, acts in service of guiding the ideal audience into a relationship of trust with the Patrul, the author.

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* thus displays reflexive tendencies in so far as it mirrors form with content (essential practices and essentializing condensation exercises), connects content and affect (dependence on one's guru and the audience's dependence on the model author), and calls attention to itself as a performance of its own author's status as a skillful teacher. In the next chapter, I will introduce another of Patrul's compositions, one that offers an even more dramatic example of Patrul's appeal to reflexive strategies. This work will provide us with the opportunity to further theorize the role of the performative in Patrul's life-advice works.

## Chapter 4: Confident Eloquence—Reflexivity of Teacher & Text

In chapter 3, I discussed how *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* frames its advice instructions as performances by a hermit yogin, thus calling attention to its model author's value as someone who can offer skillful speech to those with whom he interacts. These performances likewise display the text's author's mastery and control over the entirety of the Buddha's teachings, the totality of which are implicated in the text's condensation exercises.

In the following discussion, I will explore another, more complex example, of Patrul's self-presentation within his advice compositions. Patrul will again structure his teachings within a loose narrative form, creating characters who voice his instructions. Like *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, this work is self-reflexive in multiple-ways: matching form and content and calling attention to the status of its author. It is likewise performative, framing the instructions that appear in the work as performances to be judged. To a far greater extent than *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, however, this work establishes Patrul's own status as a skillful teacher at the forefront. It thus provokes a series of questions about the role of advice compositions in Patrul's own practice of self-conception, questions that will be addressed explicitly in chapter 5.

The work, entitled *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* (*Chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*), is a short narrative, running all of nine pages long. It takes the form of a conversation between a group of old people and a group of younger ones. Their dialogue concerns the meaning of a colloquial phrase used by the youth that the elders do not understand. After the youth provide the elders with a multifaceted explanation

of the term's meaning, the old people respond with a scathing criticism of the youth's exposition. The text concludes with the youth defending their explanation.

The table of contents to the Gangtok publication of Patrul's collected works labels the composition as a "laughter-discourse" (*bzhad gad kyi gtam*). The full title is *A Humorous Chapter that Generates Amazement: The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* (Ngo *mtshar bskyed pa bzhed gad kyi gnas chu gru lus kyi rnam bshad*).<sup>354</sup> I would hesitate to call *bzhad gad kyi gtam* a genre, though Patrul does mention this form of discourse in an informal taxonomy that he lays out in the introduction to the short historical work of his discusse in chapter 1.<sup>355</sup> Given the nature of the composition in question, I would recommend thinking of the text as a "playful" discourse. I have yet to find comparable *bzhad gad kyi gtam* attributed to Buddhist teachers, though they certainly exist. Already in the twelfth-century, for example, Lama Zhang makes reference to using humor (*bzhad gad*) in service of Buddhist teaching.<sup>356</sup> The most likely place to find these kinds of texts would be *gtam tshogs* and *bslab bya* collections—collections of instructions that address wide varieties of audiences.<sup>357</sup>

True to its billing, the work contains funny moments, witty turns of phrase, and playful manipulations of its audience's expectations. The text's interests go beyond entertaining the audience, however. It is didactic, skillfully transmitting esoteric

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<sup>354</sup> See the table of contents to *Rdza dpal sprul, Gsung 'bum* 1970, vol. 1. The *bzhed gad* in the title should read *bzhad gad*.

<sup>355</sup> *Rdza dpal sprul, Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 290-291.

<sup>356</sup> Yamamoto, "Vision and Violence," 164.

<sup>357</sup> Many thanks to the late Gene Smith for his suggestions on this front. There are a number of contemporary *bzhad gad*, *dgod gtam*, or *mtshar gtam* collections of humor, though these all seem to be "secular," in that they are composed and edited by non-lamas. They include humorous skits and dialogues, as well as speeches for public occasions (*'bras dkar*). See, for example, Bsod nams tshe ring, *Bzhad gad dpyid kyi pho nya*. My preliminary research suggests that these materials are significantly different in tone and content from Patrul's composition. One obvious place to look for the intersection of Tibetan ethical advice and playful narratives are the ubiquitous A khu ston pa stories. A few of these are reproduced in contemporary *dgod gtam* collections such as the one listed above.



philosophical and ethical content through the use of multivalent allegory; it is stylistically diverse, making use of multiple rhetorical styles such as narrative, polemic and counter-polemic, and hymnal praise; and it is reflexive, placing its author, Patrul himself, into the narrative as if he were a character in the story.

Above all, the text presents us with a series of interpretive challenges. Are the characters of the youth and the old men meant to represent specific people? What does the youth's seemingly allegorical explanation of "water, boats, and bodies" actually teach us? Why does Patrul appear as a character in his own composition? What is this playful composition ultimately trying to achieve?

### **Water, Boats, and Bodies: The Story Begins**

One day, a group of old men (*rgan pa dag*) are resting on the side of the road, when some young people (*gzhon pa dag*) walk past. Some time later, the young folks return, having attended to some business.<sup>358</sup> The old folks, presumably recognizing the youngsters from earlier on, stop them to have a chat.

Young men, what have you heard, what have you understood, what is there for you to explain?<sup>359</sup> . . . Elders, we haven't heard anything, understood anything, there is nothing to be explained, not even "water-boats-bodies."<sup>360</sup>

According to several native speakers, the phrase "water-boats-bodies" (*chu gru lus*) is a colloquial idiom used in the Derge (*Sde dge*) region of Eastern Tibet, meaning something

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<sup>358</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 342: *gzhon pa dag . . . song nas rang gi don dang bya ba 'ga' zhig gi don gang yin pa de bsgrubs nas slar ong ba*. My English rendering of the narrative is a close paraphrase of the text, though I often will provide the Tibetan in footnotes such as these for reference purposes. All direct translations are either placed in quotation marks or (more often) are indented to signal a block quotation.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 342: *a bu dag/lo brgya dag/ci zhig ni thos/ci zhig ni go/bshad par bya ba ni ci zhig yod/* I have chosen not to translate the respectful addresses the old men use for the youth. Loosely, "*a bu dag/lo brgya dag*" translates as "youngsters, ones who should live many years."

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 342: *sku tshe lags/dgung lo lags/ thos pa dang/go ba dang/ bshad par bya ba ni chu gru lus kyang med do/* Again, I chose not to translate literally the honorific forms of address used here for the elders (*sku tshe lags/dgung lo lags*).

like “nothing at all.”<sup>361</sup> In the text, Patrul has decided to transcribe this purely oral idiom (pronounced *chu-dru-lu*) using the three words “water” (*chu*), “boat” (*gru*), “body” (*lus*). When the youth declare that “there is nothing to be explained, not even ‘water-boats-bodies,’” they are therefore simply saying “there is nothing to be explained—nothing at all.”

The older men respond to the youth, explaining that while they understand that the youth have not heard anything or understood anything, they do not know what the youth mean by the phrase “water-boats-bodies” (*chu gru lus*). Here I want to pause to call attention to the portrayal of the older men. The text has them communicate with the youth in a manner suggestive of a word-commentary (*tshig 'grel*) to a canonical text. Rather than simply asking what “water-boats-bodies” means, the older men launch into a lengthy commentary on the youth’s claim not to have heard anything, understood anything, or have had anything to explain. So, for example, the old men give a long-winded explanation of what they had meant when they asked whether the youth had “heard” anything: namely they had been asking whether the youth had “heard in their ear passages any conversations resounding in the various places” to which the youth had traveled.<sup>362</sup>

By having them speak in this formal way, the text identifies the old men as well-educated. In fact, this is only the first of a number of moments in the narrative wherein the composition emphasizes the elders’ formal, literal, and intellectually conservative approach to communication. The text will later suggest that these old

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<sup>361</sup> Sincere thanks to Tulku Thondup, Thupten Phuntsok, and Zagsa Paldor for identifying and confirming the meaning of this phrase.

<sup>362</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 342: *thos pa zhes bya ba ni/phyogs dang phyogs su grags pa'i skad cha khyed kyi rna lam la thos pa cung zad yod dam zhes dris pa la de med do zhes zer ba lte de ni go'o/*

men are monastic elites who are obsessed with the scholastic activities of commentary, composition and debate, traditional responsibilities of Tibetan monastic-scholars.<sup>363</sup> It will also have them raise quite literalistic complaints about the sermon that youth deliver later in the story.<sup>364</sup> The text deliberately positions the youth, and ultimately himself, in opposition to these old men and their intellectual habits.

By structuring *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* as a conversation between old men and young men, the text is also playing with our expectations. We are conditioned to expect from Buddhist morality tales that the older men will be the wise teachers, tasked with showing the youth how to live in accordance with Buddhist teachings. In fact, Patrul composed just such a text, called the *Responses to the Questions of the Boy Loden* (*Gzhon nu blo ldan kyi dris lan*), wherein an old wise man educates a young, troubled boy about worldly and religious ethics.<sup>365</sup>

But in *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*, things are not as we might expect. It is the youth, and not the elders, who are the wise distributors of knowledge, as becomes clear in the youth's response to the elders' question about "water-boats-bodies." It is playful twists like this one that qualify this treatise as a humorous, playful discourse (*bzhad gad kyi gtam*). Such twists signal to the audience that the text is engaging in a verbal performance, meant to simultaneously educate and entertain.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 349. The most famous Tibetan discussion of these three scholarly responsibilities is Sakya Pandita's (Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251) *Mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo* (*The Entrance Gate for the Wise*). For studies of the work see Jackson, *Entrance Gate for the Wise*; Gold, *Dharma's Gatekeepers*.

<sup>364</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 348. I will review these complaints later in the chapter.

<sup>365</sup> See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 31-55. For English translations, see Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*; and Acharya Nyima Tsering's translation in Patrul Rinpoche, *Way of Living*.

<sup>366</sup> For anthropological theorizations of how performers across cultures signal to their audiences that they are engaging in "verbal art" (modes of communication where speakers assume the responsibility of communicative competence subject to evaluation by an audience), see Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*; and Babcock, "Story in the Story," as discussed in the dissertation's introduction.

## Water, Boats, and Bodies: Take One

After the old men finish asking the youth what they had meant by “water-boats-bodies,” the youth respond with a five-page long etymology of the phrase. This etymological performance is the explanation of “water-boats-bodies” suggested by the title of the work.

The youth proceed to explain the phrase “water-boats-bodies” (*chu gru lus*) by offering interpretations of each of its three syllables. The youth’s performance stands in sharp contrast to the literal unpacking of the words “heard” and “understood,” that the older men just presented. The creativity and elegance of the youth’s interpretation of “water-boats-bodies” call attention to the literal-mindedness and conservativeness of the old men’s contribution.

The youth’s interpretation of water (*chu*) goes as follows:

Water, which comes from the Great Ocean for the purpose of eliminating the stains and the thirst of the world, goes from place to place. Ultimately, it flows and falls back into the Great Ocean, which is the resting place for all water. Still, that water has nothing at all added or taken away from it, nor is it sullied or stained. Just as it is when it leaves the Great Ocean, so too it is when it later returns again to the Great Ocean. And yet, on its way, different people drink it, bathe with it, transform it, and so on. So it appears. In the same way, we [the youth] leave our homes for various purposes, go to different places, meet different people in these places, talk about things, enjoy ourselves, and so on. Nevertheless, there is nothing that we newly understand that we have not heard, understood, or known before. It is just like the example of rivers.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 343–44: *chu ni 'jig rten gyi dri ma dang skom pa sel ba'i phyir rgya mtsho chen po nas 'ong ste phyogs nas phyogs su 'gro zhing/ mthar chu thams cad kyi gnas rgya mtsho chen po der gzhol zhing 'bab pa yin mod kyi/ chu de la ni phyogs dang phyogs nas bsnon pa dang bri ba dang rnyogs pa dang dri mar gyur pa cung zad med de/ sngar rgya mtsho nas ji ltar song ba ltar phyis kyang rgya mtsho chen por slar 'ong mod kyi/ chu bo chen po dag 'gro ba'i lam de dang de dag tu ni gzhan 'ga' zhig gis btung ba dang/ bkru ba dang/ bsgyur ba la sogs pa byed pa ltar ni snang ngo/ de bzhin du kho bo dag rang gi khyim nas don dang bya ba 'ga' zhig gi phyir phyogs dang phyogs su 'gro zhing/ de dang de dag tu 'ang/ 'ga' zhig dang 'phrad pa dang/ gtam bya ba dang/ dga' bar bya ba la sogs pa ni yod mod kyi/ sngar ma thos pa dang/ ma go ba dang/ ma shes pa dag gsar du go ba dang thos pa ni ci yang med de dper na chu klung dag bzhin no/*

The youth draw a connection between the term water (*chu*) and their own activities. Water, which the youth interpret as “rivers” (*chu klung dag*),<sup>368</sup> comes from a single source—the great ocean (*rgya mtsho chen po*). (This is a traditional Tibetan conception of the path of rivers: from the Ocean, to the Ocean).<sup>369</sup> The water from these rivers accomplishes the aims of others: water quenches thirst, for example. And yet, according to the youth, river-water always returns to its source without ever changing. In just the same way, the youth go from and return to their homes, without changing—without gaining any new knowledge—yet are still able to accomplish things along the way, such as talking to people that they meet.

The youth then continue on to the next syllable: boats (*gru*). Like river-water, a boat is something that accomplishes its aims without changing at all, the youth explain.

For the purpose of transporting others, boats go from one side of a river to the other, and come back again, going and returning continually. Sometimes these boats transport merchants, sometimes other guests, sometimes women, monks, gurus, *brahmans*, thieves, butchers, and so on. But when they come back again, however they were before, they are still that way: they are not filled [with anything new] nor are they depleted . . . In the same way, we leave our homes and go to others’ homes and later come back to our own homes . . . sometimes meeting and seeing men, sometimes women, and sometimes children. Still, we never understand or hear anything new from them that we had not understood or heard previously.<sup>370</sup>

Boats go places and accomplish things without changing in any meaningful way, just as the youth go places and meet people without learning anything new.

<sup>368</sup> The Tibetan word *chu* means “water,” but it can also refer to a “river.” Towards the end of their etymology of *chu*, the youth explicitly identify their example as referring to “rivers” (*chu klung dag*).

<sup>369</sup> Per a personal communication with Lobsang Shastri, August 2011.

<sup>370</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 344–45: *gru ni gzhan dag sgrol bar bya ba'i phyir tshu rol nas pha rol du 'gro ba de las kyang slar 'ong ste de ltar 'gro ba dang ldog pa rgyun yang mi chad la/ gru des ni res 'ga' tshong pa/ res 'ga' 'gron po gzhan/ res 'ga' bud med dang/ dge slong/ bla ma/ bram ze/ rkun po/ shan pa la sogs pa bsgral te 'gro yang/ gru de slar 'ong ba'i tshe na ni sngar ci 'dra ba de 'dra ba las/ bri ba yang med/ gang ba yang med do/ . . . de bzhin du kho bo yang rang gi khyim nas kyang khyim gzhan du 'gro de nas kyang slar rang gi khyim du 'ong ste . . . res 'ga' skyes pa dang/ res 'ga' bud med dang/ res 'ga' byis pa dang/ phrad pa dang/ mthong ba dag yod mod kyi de dag las bdag gis cung zad sngar ma go ba'am/ ma thos pa/ gsar du go ba dang thos pa ni cung zad kyang med do/*

The same pattern holds for the third syllable, “bodies” (*lus*): bodies accomplish things without changing in any meaningful way. As the youth explain, bodies enter into the boats that cross rivers and ride them to the far shore. But, along the way, the passengers (with their bodies) never gain anything or change in any way—they never leave any remains behind them in the boat, for example. Yet the passengers and their bodies do accomplish something: they make it to the other side of the river.

In this third example, the youth pun on the word “body” (*lus*). *Lus*, in its nominal form, means a body. But, in verbal form (*lus pa*) it means to leave something behind as a remainder. *Lus* refers to the body that enters into the boat, and it refers to the fact that nothing is *left as remains* in the boat after each successive trip across the river.

In the same way that bodies enter into and depart from boats without gaining anything or leaving anything, so too do the youth enter into and depart from other people’s homes without gaining anything or leaving anything, they continue. Still, like the boat-passengers who accomplish their goal of crossing the river, so too do the youth accomplish their aims.<sup>371</sup>

We thus find the youth presenting a narrative etymology of “water-boats-bodies” that justifies their use of the idiom in the context of their activities. “Water-boats-bodies” means “nothing at all” because each element of the word refers to things that, according to their interpretation, do not change at all (despite their efficacy). The colloquial expression and its meaning (“nothing at all”) match the youth’s usage

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 345.

perfectly, as they insist that they have traveled around accomplishing things without being changed in the sense of hearing or learning anything new.

The youth's etymology is not only successful, but it is also elegant, as the youth themselves point out.

Furthermore, because water [or rivers] are the base, boats enter into rivers, and bodies enter into boats . . . the three are presented . . . in order of support and thing supported thereby.<sup>372</sup>

The performers inform us that there is a tidy systematicity to the “water-boats-bodies” etymology that they have just offered. Water is explained first because it is the material support for boats. That is to say, boats float on water. Boats come next because they are the material support for the bodies that enter into them. Water supports boats, which support bodies. This short statement shows the youth calling attention to their own eloquence, making sure that the audience of *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is well attuned to the elegance of the etymology that it has just heard.

### Water, Boats, and Bodies: Take Two

Despite the proficiency and elegance of their etymology, the youth do not stop at just one explanation.

For the purpose of temple ceremonies, or for the purpose of virtuous kindness towards people from different places who have become sick or who have died, we continually attend gatherings of the monastic community, where we recite mantras, chant, meditate and so on. Sometimes, we also set out for some small purpose of our own. We will therefore set forth three examples, in order, in relation to these pursuits.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 345-6: *de yang chu ni gzhi yin la/ gru ni chu la 'jug/ lus ni grur 'jug pa'i phyir . . . de dag gi snga phyi rten dang brten pa'i go rim gi dbang gis . . . dpe gsum po rim bzhin tu bzhag pa yin no/*

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 346: *phyogs gzhan dang gzhan gyi mi zhig na ba dang shi bar gyur pa de dang de dag gi sku rim mam dge rtsa'i phyir yang nas yang du dge 'dun gyi tshogs su 'gro ste der ni kho bos bzlas pa dang/ klog pa dang/ sgom pa la sogs pa gzhan la phan pa 'ga' zhig gi phyir zhugs pa yin la/ res 'ga' ni rang gi don phran bu dag gi phyir yang 'gro zhing 'ong ba de dag gi phyir yang dpe gsum du rim pa bzhin bzhag pa ste/*

Thus begins a second interpretation of “water-boats-bodies,” this time related to the details of the purposeful activity of the youth. In yet another twist, the youth are no mere children, but are full members of society who dedicate themselves to the needs of others by participating in religious rituals to heal the sick and aid the deceased. The text again plays with our expectations. When we originally meet the youth at the outset of the narrative, the text leads us to believe that they were simply attending to their personal business, giving us no hints that there was anything special about them. “For the purpose of some business and affairs (*don dang bya ba*) a group of youth went to various places,” it informs us.<sup>374</sup> But, as the youth now reveal, their business entails participating in religious gatherings and serving others.

The youth connect their purposeful activities to water (or here rivers) in the following manner:

Just as rivers accomplish various benefits like eliminating stains [1] and thirst [2], maintain the life-force [3] and then finally enter into the Great Ocean [4], in the same way. . .<sup>375</sup>

The youth draw parallels between the beneficial activities of water and their own beneficial participation in temple ceremonies, which:

. . . accomplish various benefits like eliminating the stains of illness [1] and activating the power of medicine and so on to get rid of the harm of demons which is comparable to the thorn-like pain of thirst [2], and in addition cause [the sick] to stay for a long time [3], and, at the end of all of that, by means of making a final dedication, cause the [merit of this activity] to fall into the Ocean of Omniscience [4].<sup>376</sup>

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 342: *don dang bya ba 'ga' zhig gi phyir gzhon pa dag phyogs phyogs su song ngo.*

<sup>375</sup> The numbers in brackets are my own additions for the purpose of pointing out how this round of interpretation is structured. Ibid., 346: *chu klung gis 'gro ba dag gi dri ma dang skom pa sel zhing phan pa du ma byed de srog gnas par byed cing mthar rgya mtsho chen por 'jug pa bzhin du . . .*

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 346: *nad kyi dri ma sel zhing/ gdon gyi gnod pa skom pa'i zug rngu lta bu med par byed la sman gyi mthu bskyed pa la sogs phan pa du ma byed cing thog yun ring du gnas par byed de bya ba de dag mjug bsngo bas rgyas 'debs pa'i phyir rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i rgya mtshor 'bab pa.*



How does this comparison work? The following paraphrase summarizes the argument.

1. Water washing away stains is analogous to youth participating in ceremonies that eliminate illness.
2. Water eliminating thirst is analogous to the youth participating in ceremonies that eliminate the pain caused by demons.<sup>377</sup>
3. Water maintaining one's life force is analogous to religious ceremonies keeping people alive for a long time.
4. Water finally returning to the great ocean, its source, is analogous to monks sending the merit of their activities back into the "ocean" of omniscience by means of the traditional prayers for dedicating merit that close out Buddhist ceremonies and meditation sessions.<sup>378</sup>

The youth display their interpretive prowess by analogizing the virtuous activity of healing the sick, described in four points, to four characteristics of water. The youth simultaneously demonstrate to the old men (and to the audience) their altruistic intention to benefit others.

How do boats (*gru*) relate to the youth's selfless activities? Boats are used to cross over a river, when one is trying to get from one side to the other, because one cannot cross on one's own. In a parallel way, the youth, together with monks, rely on the Buddha's teachings to transfer the consciousness of the dead, who are just like

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<sup>377</sup> In Tibetan culture, negative spirits are sometimes credited with causing physical maladies.

<sup>378</sup> Tibetan Buddhism recognizes that religious practitioners generate positive karmic merit by participating in religious rituals, offering prayers, visiting holy sites, and so on. It is common for a ritual or a meditation session to conclude with a dedication prayer that expresses the wish that all of the positive merit accrued during the practice ultimately benefit all beings. The "ocean of omniscience" is a standard metaphor referring to the all-knowing, all-pervasive wisdom of enlightenment.

people stuck in the middle of a river, over to the dry land of liberation.<sup>379</sup> In this interpretation the youth employ the common Buddhist trope of the Buddha's teachings acting as the raft that takes suffering beings across to the far shores of liberation. Here, the youth actually analogize the river-to-be-crossed to the realm in between death and rebirth called the *bar do*. The idea is that by reciting special instructional texts after someone has died, one is able help lead that person out of the *bar do* realm and on to a preferable rebirth. The teachings that one recites in order to help the recently deceased are comparable to boats that take people across rivers.

And what of bodies?

One does not enter into a boat for the good of the river. Nor does one enter the boat for the good of the boat. Nor for anyone else. Rather, one puts one's body into the boat only for the sake of oneself and for the sake of the hat and clothing that one is wearing. In this way, when we go out for the purpose of some small provisional business, we exclusively go out for purpose of the small tasks of ours and of those friends of ours, like you, who depend on us.<sup>380</sup>

Here, in a particularly humorous moment of the work, the youth explain that one enters into a boat in order to get oneself to the other side—not in order to help out anyone else (and certainly not for the good of the river nor for the good of the boat). So too, the youth explain, do they periodically leave their homes in order to accomplish their own tasks or to attend to their own business. While the humor of this passage may not translate well, I can attest to the fact that this line caused one Tibetan with whom I read the text to laugh out loud. The humor lies in the absurd suggestion that one would ever cross a river in a boat for the benefit of either the river or the boat.

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 347: *lus ni chu'i don du'ang grur 'jug pa min/ gru'i don du'ang ma yin/ gzhan su'i don du'ang ma yin te lus ni rang nyid dang rang la brten pa'i zhwa gos tsam chu las sgrol ba 'ba' zhig gi phyir 'jug pa de dang 'dra bar kho bo yang gnas skabs kyi don phran bu dag gi phyir 'gro ba'i tshe rang dang rang la brten pa'i grogs khyed cag gi bya ba cung zad de'i phyir 'gro bar zad/*

Having delivered two intricate, creative, and extensive etymologies of “water-boats-bodies,” the youth conclude their oration with a moment of heightened bravado.

The youth declare in verse:

If you were to write down the meaning of “water-boats-bodies”  
You could use up all of the paper that there is in a store  
And all of the ink in the possession of a scholar  
Yet you would never use up our intelligence  
Nor would you use up the meaning of “water-boats-bodies.”<sup>381</sup>

The youth’s capacity to interpret the meaning of “water-boats-bodies” is inexhaustible, they playfully boast. All of the paper or ink that one could possibly find would be still insufficient to document the interpretations that they are capable of spinning about “water-boats-bodies.” The youth’s subject material—the etymology of “water-boats-bodies” is so rich—that its (hidden) meaning (*don*) can never be exhausted. The youth themselves are so smart that their intelligence (*blo gros*)—namely their capacity to offer skillful interpretation—will never run out.

### Critique & Response

So how do the old men respond to the youth’s eloquent outburst? They are not impressed. The old men begin by chanting a “*maṇi*” (the six-syllable mantra *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*) and offer a prayer to the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara, which signals the beginning of a formal response on their part. The old men then offer a critique, in verse, of the exposition that they have just heard. I mentioned earlier that the text depicts these old men as highly educated, formal and rigid, having had them articulate unnecessary, pedantic definitions of “heard” and “understood” earlier in the story. The text now continues with its portrayal of the old men as formally rigid and

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 348: *chu gru lus kyi don 'di bri na yang/ tshong khang ji snyed shog bu zad 'gyur zhing/ mkhan po ji snyed snag tsha zad 'gyur gyi/ kho bo'i blo gros zad par mi 'gyur te/ chu gru lus kyi don kyang mi zad do/*

obsessed with scholastic modes of teaching. The overarching concern in their critique is that the youth's creative etymologies of “water-boats-bodies” do not live up to the standards of a traditional word-commentary, such as a commentary one might find to a Tantric root text.<sup>382</sup>

Over the course of their short, terse, versified response, the old men criticize the youth for the following faults:<sup>383</sup>

1. Unlike tantric commentaries (*rgyud 'grel*), the youth's “water-boats-bodies” commentary does not add grammatical notes, like adding a final Tibetan “*sa*” particle in order to make the grammar of a root text more clear. Nor does the “water-boats-bodies” commentary add ornamental words to fill out the meaning of the root text. [The fundamental argument is that the “water-boats-bodies” etymology cannot be a legitimate teaching because it does not look the way that a proper word-commentary should look.]<sup>384</sup>
2. The “water-boats-bodies” commentary does not use authoritative quotations or evidence from the Buddhist canon.
3. The “water-boats-bodies” commentary, while having been written in a way that is easy to follow, does not properly connect the commentary to the root text (where the root text is simply the phrase “water-boats-bodies”). Consequentially, it contains many contradictions. [The old men offer this critique without citing any examples].

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<sup>382</sup> A Tantric root text is a text whose composition is attributed to an enlightened Buddha and which authorizes a wide variety of practices centering on one specific, enlightened deity. The “cycles” that surround these root texts include commentaries (such as glosses of the words of the *tantra*), practice instructions, and ritual manuals related to the deity in question.

<sup>383</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 348-349.

<sup>384</sup> Adding grammatical particles and clarificatory glosses are practices typical of Tibetan inter-linear commentaries.

4. The “water-boats-bodies” interpretation suffers from the fault of not having been subjected to debate.

The text has the old men set forth various possible formal criteria for evaluating a sermon, all of which they find lacking in the youth’s discourse. They mention the use of grammatical analysis and ornamentation, the use of evidence from the Tibetan Buddhist Canon (the Kanjur and Tanjur), the consistency of the teaching with its source material, and the subjection of teachings to debate. These principles of evaluation recall Sakya Paṇḍita’s (Sa skya paṇ ḍi ta Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251) normative criteria for the scholarly activities of composition, exposition (teaching), and debate. Sapan’s *Mkhas ’jug* argues for the importance of mastering grammar and the ornamental figures of Sanskrit poetics in training scholars to compose and comment on Buddhist treatises (skills represented by critique number 1, above). He also advocates for appealing to scripture (*lung*) (item 2 above) and reasoning (*rigs*) to identify the flaws of false tenets (item 3). Finally, he identifies debate (item 4) as a means whereby properly trained scholars can preserve and defend the Buddhist tradition.<sup>385</sup> Whether or not Patrul intentionally presents the elder monks as voices for Sapan, these characters nonetheless embody the scholastic model of discursive of production that Sapan came to represent in Tibet.

The youth’s subsequent response is everything we might expect it to be: confident and creative. Perhaps as a signal to the scholastically minded old men that they won’t be out-done, the youth deliver their response in verse, as well. They begin:

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<sup>385</sup> Jackson, *Entrance Gate for the Wise*, 97-103. See, also, Gold, *Dharma’s Gatekeepers*; Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*.

In general, since engaging in explanation, debate, and composition is indispensable for leaders of monasteries, you too have composed this polemical critique.<sup>386</sup>

Here, the youth explicitly identify the old men as leaders of a monastery, ones who have received training in the three scholarly disciplines of exegesis, debate, and composition. Mention of these three disciplines explicitly links them to Sapan's model of scholarly activity, as articulated in the *Mkhas 'jug*.

The contrast that the text constructs between the old men and the youth is becoming increasingly clear. The text presents the old men as caricatures of monastically educated scholars who have strict, formal expectations about what an authentic teaching should look like. In this case, they expect the youth's exposition to look like a word-commentary to a root-text, complete with canonical citations, and expect the interpretation to be subjected to formal debate. The youth, with their eloquent performance, embody a more open-minded model of discursive production, one better tuned to the needs of a broader, non-monastic audience, as they will soon suggest.

This contrast situates *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* within a longstanding debate in Tibet over the form of authentic (and therefore trustworthy) teachings. Jonathan Gold has argued that Sakya Paṇḍita established strict criteria for scholastic training, composition, and evaluation of Buddhist teaching in order to establish the scholastically trained monk as a protector (a “gatekeeper”) of Buddhism—someone who could prevent the erosion of the teachings at the hands of those Tibetans who faultily transmit Buddhist knowledge by adding their own inauthentic

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<sup>386</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 349: *spyir na 'chad rtsod rtsom pa gsum/ dgon sde'i mgo 'dzin byed pa la/ med thabs med pa de lags pas/ khyed kyang rtsod pa'i 'byams yig 'di/*

innovations.<sup>387</sup> For Sapan, it was not enough to cite one's personal lama's teachings when explaining the provenance of one's practices.<sup>388</sup> Sapan's criticisms, we might note, targeted teachers (Gampopa) and practices (the "singly efficacious white remedy," treasure revelations, Nyingma tantric practices) with which Patrul had great affinity.<sup>389</sup>

Sure enough, the youth respond to the elder's criticisms by doing just what Sapan criticized—appealing to the authority of their teacher. But their appeal brings with it yet another surprise:

This explanation of "water-boats-bodies" is well known to scholars of superior monasteries. The composer, Gewai Pal (*Dge ba'i dpal*) . . .<sup>390</sup>

Gewai Pal is none other than Patrul himself.<sup>391</sup> The youth continue to describe him as follows:

Gewai Pal, the youth continue:

. . . Gewai Pal is one whose intelligence gained from meditation is entirely clear . . . It is not possible that he would be without the confidence of knowing that he can never be trampled in debate, nor is it possible that he would ever speak nonsense. The composer of the commentary, Palgi Gewa, has the understanding gained from opening hundreds of texts and has the confident eloquence (*spobs pa*) of speaking hundreds of words. If he were to be the defendant in a debate, he would propose a firm thesis and would display the intelligence to prove his

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<sup>387</sup> Gold, *Dharma's Gatekeepers*.

<sup>388</sup> Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means*, 100.

<sup>389</sup> For Sapan's critiques of Gampopa (Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079-1153), Lama Zhang (Zhang tshal pa Brtson 'grus grags pa, 1122-1193), and the "singly efficacious white [remedy]" (*dkar po gcig thub*) method of introducing students to the empty nature of their own minds, see Jackson, *Enlightenment by a Single Means* and Yamamoto, "Vision and Violence," chapter 2. Patrul, of course, taught and practiced Nyingma treasures (*gter ma*) and *tantras* (in particular *Guhyaagarbha*). But Patrul's writings also speak to his close connection with Gampopa's teachings. He cites Gampopa multiple times in *Words of My Perfect Teacher* and makes reference to the idea of *dkar po gcig thub* in his *zhal gdams* compositions. See Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 12, 208; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 284.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 349: *chu gru lus kyi nram bshad 'di/ dgon stod mkhas pa mang la grags/ gzhung bshad dge ba'i dpal ba khong/ . . .*

<sup>391</sup> Patrul (*Dpal sprul*) is an abbreviation of the title Palge Tulku (*Dpal dge'i sprul sku*), meaning "the Palge incarnation." Patrul was recognized at a young age as the incarnation of the Palge Lama Samten Puntsho (*Dpal dge'i bla ma Bsam gtan phun tshogs*), as discussed in chapter 1. Gewai Pal (*Dge ba'i dpal*) is simply an inversion of Palge (*Dpal dge*).

assertion. If he were the opponent, he would engage in sharp debate, using knowledge to destroy the assertions of the other . . . He is the master of one thousand disciples. He is like the condensation of many scholars.<sup>392</sup>

This is a spectacular moment in the text. Up until this point, the text reads as a narrative, describing an interaction between a group of youth and a group of older men. Now we learn that the etymological exposition that seemed to come spontaneously from the youth is in fact a teaching of Patrul's—who we, as the readers, (unlike the old men in the story) know to be the actual composer of the work. Patrul has placed himself into the narrative world of the composition and effectively made his own eloquence and authority as a teacher the subject matter of the composition! Such unabashed self-praise is seemingly quite rare in Tibetan religious writing.<sup>393</sup>

This rhetorical move is particularly savvy, and I should add a bit confusing, because I believe the text to be speaking playfully and even somewhat ironically. It claims, for example, that the “water-boats-bodies” teaching is well known to many scholars.<sup>394</sup> And while the work itself did eventually become well known to trained Nyingma scholars, I do not believe Patrul to be saying with a straight face that the creative etymology the youth have just performed was actually famous in its day.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 349. *dge ba'i dpal ba khong/ bsgom pa'i blo gros gting na gsal/ . . . nam phug rgol bas mi brdzi ba'i/ gdengs shig sems la ma thob par/ ma brtags ca cor gsung mi srid/ 'grel byed dpal gyi dbe ga de/ gzhung brgya 'byed pa'i rnam dpyod yod/ tshig brgya smra ba'i spobs pa yod/ sna rgol byas na dam bca' brtan/ rang 'dod bsgrub pa'i blo gros yod/ phyi rgol byas na rtsod rigs rno/ gzhan 'dod bshigs pa'i rnam rig yod/ . . . blo gsal stong gi slob dpon yin/ mkhas mang 'du pa'i 'du sa yin/*

<sup>393</sup> For an exception, see Sakya Paṇḍita's *Nga brgyad ma*, his praise of himself for possessing eight superior qualities. Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, 681-710.

<sup>394</sup> Lobsang Shastri suggested to me that this may be Patrul's way of saying that the “water-boats-bodies” etymology is nothing new, special, or particularly difficult. The statement that “this explanation of ‘water-boats-bodies’ is well known to scholars” would thereby mean that scholars perform this kind of explanation all of the time. It is as if to say that the formal old men are taking the “water-boats-bodies” entirely too seriously.

<sup>395</sup> While I am hardly prepared to offer a reception history of the *Explanation of Water Boats and Bodies*, I can report that scholars such as Thupten Phuntsok and Zagtso Paldor were quite familiar with it.



Still, despite its playfulness, the text is making a very serious claim: the authority of a given teaching *can* be based on the authority of the teacher giving that teaching. In effect, the text is defending the legitimacy of creative teaching performances, so long as capable teachers deliver such performances. It implies that Patrul himself is just such a teacher because of his confidence, erudition, the sharpness of his intellect, and the breadth of his influence. The youth thus reject the criteria that the monastically trained old men propose, instead arguing that it would be impossible (*mi srid pa*) for someone as intelligent and well-read as Patrul to have composed a meaningless, or improper teaching. They also cite Patrul's own eloquence as justification for the legitimacy of his teaching, noting the confident eloquence he has gained from extensive practice in preaching.<sup>396</sup>

Thus far, the youth defend the “water-boats-bodies” explication by appealing to the brilliance of its author. But their argument is not finished. The youth continue with their retort, now taking each element of the old men's critique one by one, beginning with a discussion of the *maṇi* mantra (*omṇ maṇi padme hūṇ*) that the old men had chanted in the opening of their polemical critique.

The six-syllable *maṇi* is said to be the essence of the *dharma*. As for its spreading, it has spread throughout Tibet. As for being known, even old women know it. As for being recited, even beggars recite it. As for being written, even children know how to write it. For scholars who compose treatises [however] there is no entry way to the *maṇi*.<sup>397</sup>

The text reminds its audience that there are profound Buddhist teachings beyond scholastic commentaries, teachings such as the *maṇi* mantra, that are accessible to the

<sup>396</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 349: 'grel byed dpal gyi dge ba 'de/ gzhung brgya 'byed pa'i rnam dpyod yod/ tshig brgya smra ba'i spobs pa yod/

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 349-50: 'bru drug ma ṇi padme 'di/ chos kyi snying po yin pa skad/ dar ba bod yul yongs la dar/ shes pa rgad mo rnams kyang shes/ 'don pa sprang po rnams kyang 'don/ bri ba byis pa rnams kyang bri/ mkhas pas bstan bcos rtsom pa la/ ma ṇi'i 'gros sgo yod rab med/

masses and yet just as potent as the scholastic treatises to which old men are so attached. This is an understated argument suggesting that scholarly monks, who do not properly value chanting the *maṇi*, are not the only purveyors of meaningful Buddhist practices. In fact, the youth suggest that the *maṇi* (as the essence of the *dharma*) is superior to the treatises that the old men produce.

The composition concludes with the youth offering a flurry of rebuttals that dismiss each of the old men's critiques, in turn. So, for example, in reference to the fault of lacking quotations from the canon, the youth declare that "knowledge" (*rig pa*)—probably meaning here some combination of learning and intelligence—is that which edits or corrects scripture (literally purifies scriptures, *lung gi dag byed*).<sup>398</sup> Because Patrul's intelligence and knowledge is well attested to, no quotations from canonical scriptures are necessary. But were they necessary, the youth add, Patrul would be able to provide quotations, regardless. And with these pithy arguments, the *Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* ends.

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<sup>398</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 250: *bka' bstan yongs la rlung rtar grags/ lung gi dag byed rig pa ni*. "The *kanjur* and *tanjur* are renown everywhere, like the wind. Knowledge is that which edits scripture." The term scripture (*lung*) in the second sentence refers to the *kanjur* and *tanjur* (the two collections of the Tibetan Buddhist canon) from the first sentence, thus implying that knowledge is what is necessary for understanding the canon. This couplet includes yet another case of Patrul's clever punning. Patrul states that knowledge is that which corrects scripture. Knowledge is, literally, the "purifier" of scripture. The term for "purifier" (*dag byed*) is also a figurative term for the wind, where the more common term for the wind (*rlung*) is used in the first half of the couplet. *Lung* (scripture) and *rlung* (wind) are also homonyms. It is difficult to translate *rig pa* in this context. When combined with *lung*, *rig* (more correctly *rigs*) specifically refers to logical reasoning. As a translation of Sanskrit *vidyā*, *rig pa* can mean intelligence, learning, or knowledge more broadly. As I will discuss in a moment, *rig pa* also figures in a traditional set of four "knowledges" attributed to *bodhisattvas*, where "knowledge" means pedagogical skill. Within Patrul's Rnying ma tradition, *rig pa* refers to the foundational awareness that is the condition for all experience. Patrul's use of *rig pa*, here, probably carries with it all of these connotations at once.

## A Discourse about Discourse

What are we to make of this curious composition? Why would Patrul compose an explanatory interpretation of something as mundane as a colloquial idiom? Why would he place himself as a character into his own narrative? What concerns of Patrul's might be hidden within this playful work?

Patrul hints at his intentions in the very first words of the composition—the opening homage to the “Gentle Protector,” the bodhisattva *Mañjunātha*. The verse introduces what I interpret to be the primary theme of the entire composition: confident eloquence. Confident eloquence—*spos pa* in Tibetan (Skt.: *pratibhāna*)—refers to some combination of preparedness, fearlessness, confidence, and eloquence in speech. Confident eloquence is one amongst a set of four “thorough, perfect knowledges” (Skt.: *pratisamvid*; Tib.: *so so yang dang par rig pa*) that appear in Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist literature as a way of categorizing the pedagogical skills of advanced bodhisattvas, those Buddhist practitioners dedicated to progressing towards enlightenment in order to rid all beings of suffering.<sup>399</sup> The set of four, often translated as “the four discriminations,” appears in numerous places in Sanskrit Buddhist literature, including the *Prajñāparamitā* in one-hundred thousand verses, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, the *Dharmasaṅgīti* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, with some sources placing this grouping of skills at the ninth of ten stages of bodhisattva training, as articulated in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> For more on *pratibhāna* see Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 260-267, 282; MacQueen, “Inspired Speech I”; MacQueen “Inspired Speech II”; Braarvig, “Dhāraṇī and Pratibhāna”; Nance, “Models of Teaching,” chapter 3; Nance, “Indian Buddhist Preachers,” 142-143.

<sup>400</sup> Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 261, 282. While the four *pratisamvid* in question are intimately connected to bodhisattva training, slightly different renditions of four *pratisamvid* do appear in non-Mahāyāna

The four thorough, perfect knowledges receive different interpretations in the Sanskrit sources and their commentaries. Briefly, however, they are as follows: the knowledge of phenomena (Skt: *dharmapratisaṃvid*; Tib: *chos so so yang dag par rig pa*), which can mean knowing all things' names and identifying qualities or knowing all Buddhist texts; the knowledge of their meaning (Skt: *arthapratisaṃvid*; Tib: *don so so yang dag par rig pa*), entailing understanding how to categorize these phenomena or how to teach given the specific requirements of the pedagogical situation at hand; the knowledge of the etymology of words (Skt: *niruktiapratisaṃvid*; Tib: *nges pa'i tshig so so yang dag par rig pa*), which refers to knowing how to speak about all phenomena using human or non-human languages; and finally the confident preparedness and skill to actually preach—what I am calling confident eloquence—which Nance describes as teaching in a fluid and inexhaustible way (Skt: *pratibhānapratisaṃvid*; Tib: *spobs pa so so yang dag par rig pa*).<sup>401</sup>

These four categories are well known to Patrul, who was steeped in theorizations of the bodhisattva path, having written commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, and even an independent work on the stages of accomplishment of bodhisattvas.<sup>402</sup> In fact, the opening, dedicatory verse actually incorporates all four knowledges into its homage. The underlined text below identifies these four knowledges as they appear in the opening verse:

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*abhidharma* sources, such as Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. See, for example, Makransky *Buddhahood Embodied*, 26.

<sup>401</sup> Compare Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 160-167; Lopez, "Sanctification of Bodhisattvas," 202; and Nance, "Models of Teaching," 178-179. The *Akṣayamatīrīrdeśa* parses confident eloquence (*pratibhāna*) as "coherent and free speech" (*yuktamuktābhilāpita*). See Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 18.

<sup>402</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vols. 2, 3, 4, 6.

Reverence to you, Gentle Protector, sun of the heart; who possesses the thorough and perfect knowledges of phenomena and their meaning, confident eloquence and the etymology of words.<sup>403</sup>

It is no coincidence that Patrul chooses to include these “knowledges” in his opening verse. The text uses the narrative that follows to model what a confidently eloquent performance by a bodhisattva looks like, and then to debate what criteria are capable of authenticating the quality of such a performance.

As is common in Tibetan compositions, the opening verse serves a dual function. First, it fulfills Patrul’s responsibility as a composer to pay respect to his teacher, to one of his spiritual ancestors, or to an enlightened hero (here, he has chosen the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī). Second, it implicitly establishes the general topic of the discourse, which I have identified as the pedagogical skills of bodhisattvas, in general, and confident eloquence, in particular. Patrul also carefully chooses the language within the verse to foreshadow the more specific content of his treatise. The phrase “thorough and perfect knowledge of the etymology of words”<sup>404</sup> refers to the skill of being able to communicate proficiently using any language, one of the four “thorough, perfect knowledges” just discussed. But the text plays with the meaning of this phrase, which literally translates as knowledge of “the etymology of a word” (*nges pa'i tshig*). The Tibetan term for etymology that appears here, *nges pa'i tshig*, as translation of the Sanskrit word *nirukti*, is best understood as a creative etymology, one that neither tries to capture the historical derivation of a word nor explain the word’s literal meaning. Rather, a creative etymology comments on the word’s meaning by looking at its

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 342: *chos dang don spobs nges pa'i tshig/ so so yang dag mkhyen ldan pa/'jam mgon snying gi nyi ma la/btud de.*

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 342: *nges pa'i tshig so so yang dag par mkhyen.*

constituent parts.<sup>405</sup> Sure enough, the sermon about “water-boats-bodies” enacted by the youth is just such an etymology—a commentary that dissects the term in question into its constituent syllables and thereby unearths its hidden resonances.

There is an additional allusion to Sanskrit theories about skillful speech hidden within *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*. When the elders ask the youth whether they have heard anything, understood anything, or have anything to explain, I believe them to be alluding to a three-fold set of requirements for preaching that appear in Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti*.<sup>406</sup> According to Vasubandhu, those who wish to teach Buddhist *sūtras* should have heard a lot (*thos pa mang po*), understood what they have heard (literally “be endowed with the basis of hearing,” *thos pa’i gzhi can*) and have retained what they have heard (literally “accumulate what has been heard,” *thos pa bsag pa*). While the Tibetan rendering of Vasubandhu’s three requirements does not map on exactly with the questions that the older folks ask of the youth, their meaning is very close. If we interpret Vasubandhu’s third criteria to mean that one has sufficiently retained what one has learned such that one is capable of explaining it, then we can understand Vasubandhu to be requiring Buddhist preachers to have heard something, to have understood it, and to be capable of explaining it—the very three things that the elders ask of the youth.

The subtext of the dialogue between the monastic elites and the youth now begins to fall into place. The elites are challenging the youth to deliver a sermon by

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<sup>405</sup> Jeffrey Hopkins, for example, translates *nges tshig* as a “creative etymology,” in contrast to the more straightforward *sgra bshad* (explanation of a word). The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* defines *nges pa’i tshig* as an explanation of a term which is itself constructed by joining multiple words. See the entry for *nges tshig* in the Hopkins Tibetan Sanskrit English Dictionary available via the Tibetan Himalayan Digital Library Translation Tool, <http://www.thlib.org/reference/translation-tool> (accessed 2 April, 2010) and the entry for *nges pa’i tshig* in *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 657.

<sup>406</sup> Skilling, “Vasubandhu and the *Vyākhyāyukti* Literature,” 319; Nance, “Indian Buddhist Preachers,” 141-2.

citing preparatory requirements that would be familiar to scholastically trained monks. The youth, however, reject these traditional requirements (there is “nothing to be explained” they boast) and implicitly reject the elite monks’ authority to determine who is capable of delivering legitimate teachings.

The text uses a performative strategy to address the questions of what constitutes creative eloquence and who is capable of delivering a successful Buddhist sermon. Rather than deconstructing the idea of “confident eloquence” in the abstract, or commenting upon passages from Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti*, the text instead has the characters in his narrative—namely the young people—perform a confident and eloquent etymology—a discourse which constitutes more than half of the work. In lieu of an analytical treatise about skillful preaching, it shows us what a masterful discourse looks like.

The performative status of the ‘water-boats-bodies’ etymology is established by way of the narrative frame of the work. As was the case in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, the performance takes the form of one character (or group of characters) answering questions posed by other ones. In *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, the sage character answers the challenges of his visitors by explaining the essential points that tie together various Buddhist categories like *dharma* (Tib: *chos*), method (Tib: *lugs*), the three vows (Tib: *sdom gsum*), and the three vehicles (Tib: *theg gsum*). Here, the youth answer the challenge of explaining to the elders the meaning of the phrase “water-boats-bodies.” But the youth do not simply offer a reply in the form of a definition, as the elders had given for “heard,” (Tib: *thos pa*)—something “heard in their ear passages

in the various places” to which the youth had traveled.<sup>407</sup> Rather, they take it upon themselves to deliver multiple rounds of etymological interpretation of the term. One might say that the youth are even showing off their interpretive prowess by way of their long response.

The idea that the etymology is a performance is bolstered by the fact that the elders find it appropriate to offer a critique of the etymology’s form. The elders could have taken a different tact, for example. They might have expanded upon the youth’s interpretation with their own insights or asked follow up questions about the meaning or application of the youth’s insights. Their attitude, in contrast, is that the youth’s discourse is something to be judged.<sup>408</sup> What is in question is the quality of the discursive event.

What, then, makes the youth’s discourse so skillful? First, their interpretation is successful on the most literal level: it offers an explanation of the colloquialism “water-boats-bodies” and why it means “nothing” in the semantic context within which they have used it. They articulate succinctly how the etymology of the phrase coincides with their usage of the term. On this level, the commentary is an enactment of skillful speech that is able to articulate the connection between a linguistic phrase and its meaning.

One might wonder, however, why the text would choose to have its characters model bodhisattva skills, such as confident eloquence, by interpreting an obscure

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<sup>407</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 342: *thos pa zhes bya ba ni/ phyogs dang phyogs su grags pa'i skad cha khyed kyi rna lam la thos pa cung zad yod dam zhes dris pa la de med do zhes zer ba lte de ni go'o/*

<sup>408</sup> “Verbal art” performances, as discussed in the introduction, signal to their audiences that they entail a special form of communication: suitable to be judged and not to be taken literally. The ‘water-boats-bodies’ etymology is just such a performance. On the relationship established between audience and performer in verbal art, see Babcock, “Metanarration in Folk Narrative.”



colloquialism. Surely, bodhisattva's preaching skills are best used to spread teachings that help sentient beings overcome suffering. How could an etymology of a local Tibetan colloquialism act as such a teaching?

From one perspective, Patrul's choice of subject matter is what makes *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* a playful, humorous discourse. The very idea that an etymology of a colloquialism could stand in for a bodhisattva's teaching is unexpected and even a bit funny.

From another perspective, however, the youth's capacity to hint at profound meanings where we least expect them to, to allegorize profound Buddhist ideas through the use of mundane examples, is itself strong evidence for their masterful teaching skills. That is to say, the fact that the youth can transmit powerful teachings even when talking about seemingly mundane matters is a testament to their brilliance as orators, and, by extension, the brilliance of *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies'* composer.

This latter argument is predicated on the assumption that the etymology of "water-boats-bodies" is, in fact, profound. But is it? How so?

### **A Dzogchen Allegory**

I would argue that Patrul does indeed intend for the youth's performance to hint at profound philosophical meanings, even while these meanings remains oblique. Many others with whom I have discussed this work, native-Tibetan speakers and scholars of Buddhism alike, have shared the intuition that the youth's etymology functions as a philosophical allegory. I will preliminarily suggest one way to interpret the youth's story about how water, boats, and bodies go places in the world without

ever being changed; how, despite the fact that water is drunk, and boats and bodies cross rivers, nothing is ever added to or taken away from any of the three. Still, as I will subsequently argue, the youth's performance is fundamentally about the *possibility* of creating a philosophically and ethically rich teaching, more than it is about delivering a teaching with a single, fixed meaning.<sup>409</sup>

I tentatively suggest that we think about “water,” “boats,” and “bodies” as metaphors for the functioning of our mind (*sems*), and the empty nature of that same mind (*sems nyid*).<sup>410</sup> We might then read the allegory as follows. Our mind engages with the world of our experiences, what Patrul will sometimes call appearances (*snang ba thams cad*): visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, or mental (thoughts and emotions, however subtle).<sup>411</sup> One might say that our mind goes out to meet these appearances, just as rivers depart from the “great ocean” in the youth's description of the journey of water; or as boats depart one shore on their way to the other, as human bodies travels on rivers on these same boats, or even as the youth depart their homes to attend to their business.<sup>412</sup>

Even while diverse, changing appearances arise for the mind, however, the nature of the mind (*sems kyi rang bzhin*) itself never changes. That is to say, the mind

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<sup>409</sup> For an example of philosophical allegory in Tibetan Buddhism (in the Nyingma tradition), see Kapstein, “The Amnesic Monarch.”

<sup>410</sup> Patrul uses a variety of terms for “the nature of mind:” *sems kyi rang bzhin*, *sems kyi chos nyid* and *sems nyid*, which could all be translated as “the nature of mind.” Related terms that appear in Patrul's writings include *sems kyi gnas lugs* (“the manner in which mind abides”) and *sems kyi rang zhal* (“mind's own-face”). He equates this empty nature of mind with *dharmakāya* (*chos sku*), as well. See Patrul's *Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam*, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 133, for one example of this equation.

<sup>411</sup> For a discussion of appearances and their empty status, see Patrul's *Theg chen lta khrid bden gnyis rab tu gsal ba*, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 293. For a statement on how all of our experiences are merely appearances, see the *Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam*, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 131.

<sup>412</sup> Of course, according to Tibetan Buddhist philosophies of mind, the mind, with its habitual tendencies, is at least partially responsible for these appearances in the first place. That is to say, the appearances do not come about on their own, separate from the mind.

(*sems*) continually experiences new, impermanent, and ultimately delusive appearances, but the underlying empty nature of the mind is always the same: empty yet capable of awareness. The distinction between the changing mind and the unchanging nature of the mind parallels the familiar distinction between the ever-changing conventional reality of appearances and the never-changing ultimate reality of the emptiness of those appearances.<sup>413</sup> Patrul's compositions, we might note, consistently emphasize the importance of looking at one's own mind (*rang gi sems la blta*) in order to identify its empty and aware nature.<sup>414</sup>

The “departures” of water from the Great Ocean in the form of rivers, for example, is an image for the way in which specific instances of water function in the world—some specific batch of water is drawn from rivers for some particular human use, like drinking. Yet, in this metaphorical rendering of where water comes from, water ultimately returns to the Great Ocean. In this state of return, the particular river-water that was used by humans is now undifferentiated from all other water in the Ocean. When the specific river-water has returned to the Great Ocean, it is just water as such, water in its nature as water, not some specific water serving a specific function. Our minds are like this water. They manifest as appearances, as individual moments of awareness wherein one has specific experiences, whether these experiences are perceptions, thoughts, or otherwise. But these instances of mind always return to their state of simply being empty, non-locatable, undifferentiable mind.

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<sup>413</sup> Patrul explicitly identifies these appearances, which our mind manifests, as conventional truth in the *Theg chen lta khrid bden gnyis rab tu gsal ba*, in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 298.

<sup>414</sup> See, for example, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 276-277; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 289, 369. Patrul's *Mkhas pa shri rgyal po'i khyad chos* is his most famous instruction on encountering the true nature of one's mind. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 5, 206-225.

But to recognize the nature of one's mind as empty is also to recognize that the nature of mind is non-arisen and therefore unchanging—nothing can ever be added to it or taken away from it. Mind is “non-arisen” in the sense of not being something that has come about as an independent entity. As Patrul sometimes mentions, mind is entirely devoid of location, smell, or color – it is empty of existence as an independent, identifiable entity.<sup>415</sup> And because it has never arisen as an independent entity, because it has never come about as a substantial, identifiable thing in the first place, it can never change or become something new.

Mind, as awareness, is like the water, boats, and bodies that are described in the youth's sermon in their tendency to interact with the world, again and again. But, mind, in its empty nature, is just like water, boats and bodies in that ultimately nothing is ever added to it or taken away from it that would change its nature.<sup>416</sup>

One helpful source for interpreting the “water-boats-bodies” allegory is Patrul's meditation instruction “The Final Great Perfection's Profound Method for Becoming Enlightened: Enlightened-Mind That Liberates Itself” (*Mthar thug rdzogs pa chen po'i sangs rgyas pa'i thabs zab mo dgongs pa rang grol*).<sup>417</sup> In this work, Patrul gives meditators practical instructions (from the Dzogchen tradition) on how to rest in the nature of mind, without trying to alter or control the way that mind manifests itself. The following passage touches upon the dual quality of mind from the perspective of a

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<sup>415</sup> See, for example, Patrul's *Theg chen lta khrid bden gnyis rab tu gsal ba*. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 3, 298.

<sup>416</sup> In a related vein, Patrul also speaks about the “unchanging clarity of the ground,” where the ground (*gzhi*) is mind in its undifferentiated, empty state. This relates to the recognition that all mental experience, no matter what it is, has as its nature the simultaneous purity and manifest clarity of innate awareness. See, for example, Patrul's instructions on recognizing one's innate awareness (*rig pa*) in the *Mkhas pa shri rgyal po'i khyad chos*. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 5.

<sup>417</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, “Mthar thug,” 633-653. For an English translation of the work, see Low, *Simply Being*.

meditator—mind’s tendency to unpredictably manifest itself in appearances and yet to always return to its fundamentally unchanged, restful, empty nature.

Although you try to fix [the mind], it goes unimpeded without any set focus.  
But if you focus on not fixing it, it returns to its own place [on its own].  
Although it has no limbs it runs everywhere,  
But if you send it, it will not go, returning to its own place [on its own].  
Although it has no eyes, it is aware of everything,  
[and these] appearances of innate awareness go to being empty [they are empty].  
This so-called essence of mind does not exist;  
While it does not exist, various [instances of] mindful awareness manifest.  
[In so far as] it is not existing, it goes to being empty.  
[In so far as] it is not not-existing, mindful awareness appears.<sup>418</sup>

This passage captures some of the (Dzogchen) vocabulary that Patrul uses to describe the nature of mind. Mind goes out (*'gro*) unimpeded (*zang thal*) and “runs everywhere” (*kun tu rgyug*) in so far as it manifests (*'char*) awareness and is capable of being aware of everything (*thams cad rig*). Yet mind also returns on its own accord (*rang sar 'khor*) to its fundamentally empty nature; it “goes” to emptiness (*stong par 'gro*). In being empty, it does not exist (*med; yod par ma yin*). This passage is thus a good example of how Patrul appeals to metaphors of movement—coming and going—when talking about the nature of mind.

For Patrul, the nature of mind never changes, of course. It is always both empty and aware. As he states in the line just preceding this passage, mind’s empty and aware qualities are undifferentiated (*dbyer med*). Mind thus never changes in its nature—nothing is ever added to it or taken away from it. Nonetheless, Patrul chooses to

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<sup>418</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, “Mthar thug,” 643: *bzhag kyang gtad med zang thal 'gro/ ma bzhag btang yang rang sar 'khor/ rkang lag med kyang kun tu rgyug/ btang yang mi 'gro rang sar 'khor/ mig ni med khyang thams cad rig/ rig pa'i snang pa stong par 'gro/ sems kyi ngo bo 'di zhes med/ med kyang dran rig sna tshogs 'char/ yod par ma yin stong par 'gro/ med pa ma yin dran rig snang/*

describe the experience of awareness as a departure, as a going ('gro ba) and a returning (rang sar 'khor).

### **Generating Meaning out of “Nothing”**

Regardless of how one interprets the opaque meaning of the youth’s “water-boats-bodies” interpretation, I would argue that *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is first and foremost about “confident eloquence”—what it looks like and the criteria for evaluating it. In this way, the youth’s etymology is about the *possibility* of creating a philosophically pregnant allegory, more than it is about one specific interpretation of that allegory.

After offering the philosophically suggestive etymology of “water-boats-bodies,” the text never returns to this allegory in order to clarify its meaning. Quite to the contrary, the youth launch into a second set of etymological explanations of “water-boats-bodies,” this time addressing their own altruistic activities, thereby deemphasizing the importance of their first interpretation. When the old men respond to the youth’s sermon, they never take issue with the specifics of the interpretation of “water-boats-bodies,” nor do they ask for clarification about the philosophical or religious consequences of the etymology. Rather, they offer criticisms about *the form* of the etymology, challenging its status as a legitimate teaching in the first place. What is at stake for the elders is the status of interpretations that do not fall within the formal, rigid framework that they expect from a treatise.

It is therefore sufficient for the text to *suggest* that it is possible for the youth to devise an elaborate allegory, without having to be explicit about how the code of the allegory should be cracked. The text succeeds as long as its audience believes there to

be profound philosophical or ethical guidance contained in the eloquent exposition, regardless of exactly how the audience chooses to interpret the sermon. The brilliance of the etymology is its capacity to infer profundity without ever spelling out its meaning.

One could argue that the text intentionally withholds a definitive explanation of the youth's etymology for another reason. By refusing to explicate its own suggestive discourse, it welcomes its readers to become active interpreters of the performance. The youth's creative etymology makes demands on the implied audience to quench its curiosity by constructing its own interpretations of the hidden meaning of "water-boats-bodies." The text's reticence is thereby productive, configuring the audience's role as readers, or listeners.

The conclusion of the youth's creative etymology of "water-boats-bodies" supports my reading of *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* as a reflexive inquiry into the skillful production of teachings—a discourse primarily about discourse. The youth conclude their sermon by boasting that their capacity to interpret "water-boats-bodies" can never be used up.<sup>419</sup> I read their boast to be a statement about the skills of someone who embodies confidence eloquence. Their implicit argument seems to go as follows: even something as seemingly inconsequential as a phrase in Derge slang is an opportunity for a skillful teacher to tease out meaning and deliver an eloquent teaching. Because of their unlimited intelligence, their capacity to provide meaningful teachings on even the most unlikely of subjects is inexhaustible.

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<sup>419</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 348.

The choice of the phrase “water-boats-bodies” for the etymology is loaded with irony, of course, making it a perfect selection for a playful, humorous discourse. “Water-boats-bodies” is a colloquial phrase and thereby mundane, making it an unlikely source for profound teachings. The fact that the youth can generate meaning out of such a seemingly insignificant idiom testifies to their interpretive talents. Not only is the colloquialism “water-boats-bodies” surprisingly mundane subject matter, but the phrase itself means “nothing.” By commenting so extensively on “water-boats-bodies,” the youth are subtly telling us that they are capable of generating meaning, inexhaustible meaning even, out of literally “nothing.”

### **Skillful Means about Skillful Means: Patrul’s *Mahāyāna* Heritage**

In my interpretation, *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is reflexive in so far as its form—a performance of a skillful discourse—mirrors its content—the question of “confident eloquence” (Tib: *spobs pa*). It is a reflexive work in that it is a skillful discourse about skillful discourse—one that addresses the topic of creative eloquence by having its characters model a creatively eloquent discourse and then debate its merits. The work thereby displays Patrul’s self-consciousness about his own work as a composer of Buddhist sermons and showcases his proclivity to compose rhetorically diverse and intelligent teachings.

The text’s reflexive approach to this topic is not without precedent in Buddhist writing. In fact, there is a long heritage of reflexive Buddhist compositions: compositions that address the topic of skillful teaching by calling attention to their own status as skillful teachings. The most famous such example is *The Lotus Sūtra*. As is well known, this early *Mahāyāna sūtra* repeatedly takes up the theme of skillful means



(Skt: *upāyakauśalya*, Tib: *thabs mkhas*), explicitly addressing this technique of the Buddha's in its second chapter.<sup>420</sup> *The Lotus Sūtra* thus shares thematic content with *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*: both works are concerned with how Buddhist teachers should instruct their followers. *The Lotus Sūtra* approaches this topic by depicting the Buddha's skillful means in a series of parables, such as the famous burning-house parable of chapter 3 (wherein the Buddha, represented by a father, lures his sons out of a burning house by promising them different chariots according to their respective tastes), the lost son parable of chapter 4, and the phantom city parable of chapter 7.

Amongst the many scholars who have worked on *The Lotus Sūtra*, William LaFleur most clearly addresses the reflexive aspect of the parables.<sup>421</sup> For LaFleur, *The Lotus Sūtra*'s parables function to point back at themselves. They are displays of skillful means *about* skillful means. As such, they do not elevate content (or end) above the vehicle of their delivery (means). These parables illustrate how the technology of delivery (parables that constitute skillful means of teaching) can also be the content (skillful means). Just as *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is a skillful discourse about skillful discourse, so too are the parables of the *Lotus Sūtra* skillful means about skillful means.

In fact, I would argue that *The Lotus Sūtra* goes to great length to call attention to its own status as a dexterous means for transmitting the *dharma*. Unlike *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*, *The Lotus Sūtra* breaks its own code—explaining how elements

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<sup>420</sup> For dating the compilation of *The Lotus Sūtra* to the early centuries of the common era, see Teiser and Stone, "Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*." For a translation of the work, see Hurvitz, trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*, based upon the fourth-century Chinese translation of Kumārajīva.

<sup>421</sup> See LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, 87. For another treatment of LaFleur's interpretation, see Leighton, *Visions of Awakening*, 27-29.

of its parables (the chariot-toys used to lure the children out of the burning house) are equivalent to Buddhist categories (the vehicles to liberation). These moments of exegesis make perfectly explicit the parables' aspiration to function as clever teachings. *The Lotus Sūtra* further draws attention to its own work as a vehicle for instruction by continually repeating itself. Its parables, for example, appear twice in a row, once in prose and then in verse. This repetition, in my mind, calls attention to the actual mode of delivery. A careful reader cannot help but compare the prose and verse renditions of each teaching, delivered in succession. As is the case with comparable attention grabbing techniques in Patrul's works, these moments draw attention to the fact that a skillful teaching is happening.

While *The Lotus Sūtra* was translated into Tibetan in the ninth century, scholars have long argued that its influence in Tibet has been minor.<sup>422</sup> At this point, I do not have any evidence of a direct influence of this work on Patrul's compositional style. With that said, I would suggest that it is likely that the reflexive expositional technology of *The Lotus Sūtra*, as described above, did become familiar to Tibetans in the thousand years between its translation and Patrul's work. I hope to pursue this question in future research.

### **A Composition about its Composer**

*The Lotus Sūtra* is reflexive in another sense. It continually refers to the act of its own preaching within its own text. So, for example, chapter 1 speaks of omens that foretell the preaching of *The Lotus Sūtra* in the future. Chapter 11 features an episode wherein a Buddha appears who had, in the past, made a vow to appear wherever *The*

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<sup>422</sup> See Teiser and Stone, "Interpreting *The Lotus Sūtra*," 3, for example.

*Lotus Sūtra* is being preached. *The Lotus Sūtra* is thus doubled—it becomes a teaching preached within the narrative of the text, while simultaneously being the text as a whole that contains those narratives. Similar self-reflexive moments appear in other *Mahāyāna Sūtras* (such as the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*), as well as in non-Buddhist Sanskrit epic literature. This technique of speaking of the event of a text being preached within the text itself most certainly had influence on Tibetan compositions, appearing, for example, in Tsangnyön Heruka's (*Gtsang smyon Heruka*, 1452-1507) famous rendition of the life story of Milarepa.<sup>423</sup>

*The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is also reflexive in this sense. Towards the end of the work, the youth begin to refer to the teaching about water-boats-bodies as a freestanding teaching, authored by Patrul. *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is thus doubled: it is referred to as a well-circulated teaching of Patrul's while still being the text that contains these references to the well-circulated teaching. *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* thereby participates in the long tradition of self-referential compositions inherited from Sanskrit literature.

The manifestation of this self-referential technique differs, in an important way, from the reflexive mode operant in *Mahāyāna sūtras* like *The Lotus Sūtra*, however. For *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is explicitly about its author—Patrul himself—while *The Lotus Sūtra* never takes up the issue of authorship, as such. Once the youth introduce Patrul as the originator of their creative etymology, it becomes clear that the composition is not just a discourse about discourse, but is also a composition about its composer.

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<sup>423</sup> See Tsangnyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*, 11-19.

Patrul's creative treatment of his own status as author, his imaginative use of the "author-function," is actually a hallmark of a number of his compositions.<sup>424</sup> In each case, Patrul calls attention to his own status as author by creating a unique persona for himself as the person delivering the instructions. We have already seen such examples, in chapters 2 and 3. *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, frames its model author as someone delivering instructions to himself. In another of his well-known (untitled) life-advice composition, Patrul similarly delivers practice advice to himself, calling himself names and pointing out his own faults.<sup>425</sup>

*The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, as examined in chapter 3, portrays Patrul as a solitary ascetic who is periodically visited by students who request teachings from him.<sup>426</sup> Patrul's *Responses to the Questions of the Boy Loden* presents Patrul as an old man delivering ethical instructions to a troubled young man. The instructions only begin, however, after the old man has proven his wisdom to the young man by trading witty insults with him.<sup>427</sup>

Still, *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is somewhat unique in Patrul's oeuvre. It both creates a narrative framework wherein characters voice Patrul's teachings, like *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, and calls attention to Patrul as the creator of these instructions, as did the *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*. Why does Patrul both create characters through which to voice his teachings and talk about himself as author in *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*? How does

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<sup>424</sup> For a discussion of the variety of ways in which the status of the author functions in a text, see Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

<sup>425</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 140-143. A translation appears in Trungpa, *Mudra*, 15-20. A second translation, this one by Constance Wilkinson, appears at various places on the internet. See, for example, <http://sealevel.ca/patrul>, accessed February 28, 2012.

<sup>426</sup> See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 272-289.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 31-55.

Patrul's reflexive turn specifically function in *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* and what are its advantages?

An important condition for the rhetorical function of the work's reflexive turn to Patrul as subject matter is the way in which the composition doubles reality. *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* depicts a realistic world: the world in which the youth enter into a conversation with the elders. Yet, once the youth name Patrul as the originator of the water-boats-bodies etymology, they make reference to a second world—the real world outside of the text, the world in which the audience knows Patrul to be the empirical author of the composition at large. There are thus two worlds side by side: a world within the text, in which the youth know of Patrul as a brilliant teacher, and the world outside of the text, in which the audience knows Patrul to have composed the work.

Wolfgang Iser's theorization of the foundational principles of fictional literature provides us with helpful vocabulary for thinking about why Patrul may have decided to structure his composition this way. Iser argues that literature is the outcome of a “fictive” process.<sup>428</sup> The “fictive” picks out the dynamic whereby a socio-historical world is doubled by appearing in an artificial, invented world. So, to cite his example, pastoral literature depicts a familiar world of life in the country. The true socio-historical world of country life thereby appears in an artificial environment: the world of the text. Iser argues that a tension is thereby created between the invented world within the text and the true world outside of the text. The “imaginary” elements of literature, situated within this doubled world of the text, are disruptions of the

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<sup>428</sup> Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*.

referential world (the country life outside of the text to which they refer).<sup>429</sup> The reader's engagement with the doubled-world of the text (what he calls "play") entails some kind of reconsideration of the referential world. This process of reconsideration, or reconfiguration, of the world is part of the psychological pleasure of the experience of reading.

For Iser, this tension between an almost-real world of literature and the empirical world outside of the text is productive. It allows for readers to experience kinds of imagination without being overwhelmed, as one can be in imaginative situations that have no structure or rules to them—such as dreams and hallucinations. The fictive doubling thereby prevents overwhelm, while still allowing imagination to take place.<sup>430</sup> Iser's treatment of the imaginative—the forms of what he calls "play" that occur within the fictive setting—is long and complex. Of relevance to my reading of *Patrul*, however, is his suggestion that within the structured setting of the "fictive," [meaning the doubled ("interwoven") world inside and outside of the text], literature can enable old meanings to become new.<sup>431</sup>

What might this mean? In the case of *The Exposition of Water, Boats and Bodies*, the old meanings that become new are established ideas about the form of Buddhist teachings and the character of Buddhist teachers. The text's treatment of the world of *dharma* instructions takes as its starting point certain safe conventions of the genre: old people speaking with young people. Still, the text calls attention to the artificiality of the situation in a number of ways. First, it flips the roles of youth and elders by having

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<sup>429</sup> For the idea of the "fictive" disrupting and doubling the world, see Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, xiv-xv, 227.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-27.

the young people sermonize to the old people. Second, it addresses the doubled-nature of the composition by self-reflexively naming Patrul as the author of the water-boats-body etymology within the narrative world of the composition. This reflexive gesture brings to the implied audience's consciousness the architecture of the composition—its doubled-nature as a composition by Patrul, within which Patrul appears as a character. By bringing the architecture of the work to the fore, it likewise induces the audience to take into consideration Patrul's efforts in structuring the work, as such. Much like in *The Lotus Sūtra*, the craftsmanship entailed in composing *The Exposition of Water, Boats and Bodies* is brought to the fore.

Iser surmises that the tension generated by the fictive process—the process of doubling the real world in an almost-but-not-entirely-real world of the work—is productive for meaning making. If this is the case, then Patrul's doubled-world of teacher-student interactions (here between youth and elders) is productive for meaning making, as well. The meaning making at the heart of *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* is concerned with the related themes of skillful discourse and the composers of such discourse. As I have argued, the work is a skillful discourse about skillful discourse and a composition about its composer. Specifically, the work puts teaching performance, and Patrul as a performer of profound teachings, on display.

The doubled structure of the work creates a space for reflection on the qualities of a skillful performance. Various criteria for evaluating such a performance are put forth by the elders, and then rejected in turn by the youth. This very evaluation of the water-boats-body etymological performance, in my mind, beckons the audience to consider for itself what makes the performance a quality teaching. The youth's appeal

to Patrul's credentials as a brilliant teacher (one who has studied Buddhist teachings, is endowed with confident eloquence, and is undefeatable in debate) likewise challenges the audience to reflect on what kinds of qualities it thinks are necessary for good teachers.

In the same fashion, by inserting Patrul as a character in the text, the work gives the audience members an opportunity to reflect on Patrul, himself. It is not teachers in the abstract who are in question, here. Rather, it is Patrul specifically, named as such in the text, whose credentials and skills are offered to the audience for reflection.

The work accomplished by *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*' reflexivity with respect to this question of teachers' skills is best seen in contrast. Another of Patrul's compositions, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, spends some time discussing the qualities that one should look for in a guru (Tib: *bshes gnyen*, literally meaning a friend, often translated as "spiritual friend"). This chapter of his work is relatively formulaic, offering a list of qualities that such a teacher should possess.<sup>432</sup> It does not, in my reading, explicitly call to mind Patrul himself as such a teacher, despite the fact that he is acting, as composer of the work, as a sort of spiritual friend himself. *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*, to the contrary, brings Patrul the teacher into discussion—all but demanding that its audience actively think about Patrul's capacities and qualities.

In this way, *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* works to build Patrul's persona as gifted teacher. It acts as a vehicle for winning over his audience member's allegiances. It beckons them to consider his instructions as masterful discourse. It

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<sup>432</sup> See Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 137-143. Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7, 220-230.



invites them to develop an active relationship with him as teacher by summoning them to spend time thinking about the ways in which he is a qualified and capable performer of teachings. The work makes demands of its audience, requiring its audience to both interpret Patrul's etymological performance, evaluate the performance, and finally consider its author's credentials. This suggests that the persuasive logic of the composition entails bringing its readers into an active relationship with the text, and, by extension, with Patrul, as teacher.

In this chapter, I have argued that Patrul places himself into his own composition, establishing himself as a character within the doubled-world of the text, in order to beckon his readers into an active consideration of him as a skillful performer of profound instructions. In the next chapter, I will reconsider Patrul's tendency to experiment with his own author-position in his advice compositions in a different light. I will address the question of the relationship of Patrul as he appears as an authorial voice in his compositions with Patrul the human being beyond his compositions. Taking as a starting point his own biographer's treatment of the relationship between Patrul the author of life-advice and Patrul the living person, I will ask how we should interpret the connection, if any, between these many "Patruls."

## Chapter 5: Patrul's Person—From Authorial Voice to Historical Author

Patrul's advice compositions are often marked by reflexive moments that call attention to their respective model authors. *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* claims itself to be a meditation on the degenerate age originally intended for its own author, written down in the hope that it would find a likeminded audience. *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage* frames itself as a performance of a cave-living yogi who answers questions and responds to challenges posed by visitors, with the text's colophon pointing out that Patrul himself composed this work while in a retreat cave. Finally, *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* presents its core teaching (a creative etymology of the phrase "water-boats-bodies") as a performance by a group of youth, yet later has the youth reveal the etymology to be a teaching of a heroic teacher named Patrul. In each case, the compositions bring the advice-giver to the attention of the implied audience. These advice-givers' performative skills, their mastery of the subject matter, and their facility as transmitters of singular practices are established as subject matter upon which the audience can reflect.

My method in chapters 2-4 has been to consider the speaker (or speakers) imbedded in these texts as model authors. The speaker of advice in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End*, the sage in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*, and the youth in *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* are not equivalent to Patrul, the historical author. Rather, these model-authors are produced by the texts. As characters that address the audience, they constitute virtual personalities to which the audience can respond.

Patrul the empirical author experimented with different ways of constructing such model authors. The author as speaker of self-directed-advice (as in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, and End*), the author as cave-bound yogi (in *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*), the author as youth (in *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*), and the author named Patrul who is responsible for the water-boats-bodies etymology—these characters are not identical with one other. Nor are they coextensive with the historical human being Patrul who composed the works wherein they appear.

Yet the heuristic distinction between the model authors that are produced via these compositions and “Patrul” the historical author of the works is not *necessarily* so cut and dry. At times, the compositions do invite their audiences to identify the model author generated by the text with the historical figure of Patrul who composed the works. This is especially the case in *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies*, where the characters within the composition name Patrul explicitly, and discuss his qualities as a teacher. The work thereby welcomes the audience to make judgments about Patrul, just as it makes pronouncements about him (by listing his qualifications, and so on). The work implicitly suggests to its audience that it should break down the distinction between the model author delivering the teachings and the historical human being named Patrul, who is ultimately responsible for the ‘water-boats-bodies’ etymology.

I propose that we follow the text’s suggestion and reflect upon this very relationship. How should we interpret the connection between Patrul the historical author and the rhetorically-rich, self-reflexive discourse that appears in his works? How should we interpret his compositions in reference to his life?

This marks an explicit shift in the object of vision for the dissertation. From a consideration of model authors and work-like devices within discourse, we are turning to questions about an historical agent. Yet this shift grows organically out of the analysis that we have been engaging in thus far. Patrul's compositions endeavor to call attention to their author, generating through the use of reflexive modalities of exposition a space for their implied audiences to reflect on the historical Patrul as a teacher. Following this provocation, built in to the works themselves, I propose that we do just that: return to Patrul the historical figure.

The urgency for us to move from the model author to the historical author is compounded by a conflict that arises out of Patrul's ubiquitous cynical rhetoric. As we discussed in chapter 2, at times Patrul's works call into question the very possibility of helpful teaching. *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* openly remarks upon the uselessness of trying to help others in a degenerate age, dismissing the trustworthiness of everyone, including those who (like the historical Patrul) offer teachings and advice.<sup>433</sup> *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle and End* mobilizes these cynical arguments in order to emotionally set up the audience to welcome the singular, essential practice of chanting the *maṇi* as a respite from the hopelessness of normal endeavors. Avalokiteśvara, the *maṇi*, and by extension the instructions that follow, become the audience's only possible refuge.

But once we move from unpacking the rhetorical logic of the composition to considering the status of Patrul as historical author, a new set of questions arises. What is the relationship between the cynical discourse that appears in Patrul's advice

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<sup>433</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 128, 129. See similar remarks in *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 287. Patrul's non-advice compositions also feature passages calling attention to the misplaced intentions of Buddhist teachers. See Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 204-5

compositions, and the life that Patrul lived beyond those texts? How, for example, should we interpret the fact that Patrul displayed such a consistent concern in his writings for how best to teach others, on the one hand, and yet dismissed outright the very possibility of successfully helping others living in the degenerate times, on the other hand?

### **A Biographer's View**

Before offering our own reading of the relationship between Patrul's discourse and Patrul's life, it will be instructive to consider how others have addressed this question. As discussed in chapter 1, Patrul's one-time student Kunzang Palden wrote the longest extant biography of Patrul, built upon a shorter work by the third Dodrubchen, Jigme Tenpe Nyima.<sup>434</sup> In a fascinating moment in his rendition of Patrul's life, Kunzang Palden chooses to use one of Patrul's life-advice compositions in order to narrate a major moment in Patrul's career. Patrul, identified as the Palge (*dpal dge*) incarnation, has just inherited the property associated with this position (the *dpal dge la brang*)—after his predecessor's nephew has just passed away. Patrul, however, decides to abandon the property in order to live the unencumbered life of a wandering ascetic.<sup>435</sup>

Kunzang Palden decides to insert one of Patrul's sermons into the narration of the episode, as if to explain his protagonist's actions. The sermon comes from one of Patrul's best-known works, his *Drama in the Lotus Garden* (*Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*), a

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<sup>434</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud"; Rdo grub chen, "Bdud rtsi'i zil thigs."

<sup>435</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 194-196.

narrative filled with *dharma* instructions to a bee who is overcome with sorrow at the loss of his lover.<sup>436</sup> The sermon, as inserted into the biography, reads as follows:

Happiness is not good, suffering is good  
If you are happy, the five poisonous emotions rage.  
If you suffer, previously accumulated evil deeds are exhausted.  
Suffering is the kindness of the Lama.

Praise is not good, blame is good.  
If praised, then pride and arrogance increase.  
If blamed, then one's own faults are exposed.  
Defamation is the gift of the Gods.

High position is not good, a low position is good.  
If you are high, pride and jealousy arise.  
If you are low, openness and dedication increase.  
A low position is the seat of superior ones.

Wealth is not good, poverty is good.  
If you are wealthy, there is the great suffering of collecting and protecting.  
If you are poor, austerity and the holy *dharma* are accomplished.  
The body of a beggar is the goal of the religious person.

Being given to is not good, being stolen from is good.  
If one is given to, then the load of karmic debt increases.  
If one is stolen from, then the debts of future lives are paid back.  
Contentment is the crown jewel of the Noble Ones.

Friends are not good, enemies are good.  
Friends hinder the path of liberation.  
Enemies are the objects of patience.  
The practice of equal taste is the crucial juncture.

If you want to practice according to *dharma*, you should act according to this advice.  
If you want to make up your mind, you should act according to this advice.  
If you want to live in a solitary retreat, you should act according to this advice.  
If you want to roam around the world, you should act according to this advice.  
The six condensed points, the essential profound advice, is the oral transmission of the sole father guru.  
These six words are the essence of the heart.  
Except to you, my sole friend, I have not shown even a hint to others.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> *Lha chos dang mthun pa'i gdam padma'i tshal gyi zlos gar*, in *Rdza dpal sprul, Gsung 'bum* 2003, 195-247.

<sup>437</sup> This translation is taken from Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Living*, 93-95; Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 195-196: *skyid na mi dga' sdug na dga' / skyid na nyon mongs dug lnga 'bar/ sdug na sngon*

These stanzas of advice, which I will refer to as the *Six Condensed Points of Profound Essential Advice* (*Gdams zab gnad kyi mdo 'gags drug*) display a number of traits common to Patrul's life-advice works. First, they enact a form of renunciation rhetoric. The stanzas flip our normal expectations of a good life: the assumption of the value of happiness, praise, and a high social position, wealth, receiving gifts, and having friends. These phenomena, the stanzas tell us, are not what they seem. We would be better off having the opposite: suffering, blame, a low position, and so on.

This mode of argumentation is in line with Patrul's renunciation rhetoric investigated in chapter 2. It fits the strategy of discounting all of the things that we normally consider to be positive in our everyday, social lives by suggesting that other people, good things (food, wealth, sleep), and seemingly virtuous activities (studying, virtuous activity, helping others) are either useless or harmful. *The Six Condensed Points of Profound Essential Advice* suggests the possibility that our everyday characterization of good things is exactly opposite of how it should be. All of the things that we crave in a good life are the very things that we should be avoiding.

Patrul inherits this specific form of renunciation rhetoric from his Buddhist predecessors. Candragomin's *Śiṣyalekha*, for example, features similar verses. Candragomin explains that suffering is better than happiness and the contemplation of

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bsags las ngan 'dzad/ sdug bsngal bla ma'i thugs rje yin/ bstod na mi dga' smad na dga'/ bstod na nga rgyal khengs  
sems che/ smad na rang skyon ther la 'bud/ mi kha lha yi pha 'bab yin/ mtho na mi dga' dma' na dga'/ mtho na  
phrag dog nga rgyal skye/ dma' na bag yangs dge sbyor 'phel/ dman sa gong ma'i gdan sa yin/ 'byor na mi dga' rgud  
na dga'/ 'byor na gsog srung sdug bsngal che/ rgud na dka' spyad lha chos 'grub/ sprang lus chos pa'i gtad so yin/  
byin na mi dga' 'phrog na dga'/ byin na lan chags khur po 'phel/ 'phrog na tshe rabs bu lon sod/ chog shes 'phags  
pa'i spyi nor yin/ gnyen la mi dga' dgra la dga'/ gnyen gyis thar lam bar du gcod/ dgra bo bzod pa'i yul du byed/ ro  
snyoms nyams len gnad 'gags yin/ chos bzhin mdzad na de 'dra dgos/ blo thag chod na de 'dra dgos/ ri khrod 'dzin  
na de 'dra dgos/ rgyal kham 'grim na de dra dgos/ gdams zab gnad kyi mdo 'gags drug/ pha gcig bla ma'i zhal  
rgyun yin/ bug cig sems kyi gtad so yin/ snying gi snying po tshigs drug 'di/ grogs gcig khyod rang ma lags pa/  
gzhan la tshig zur phud pa med/

unpleasant things is better than the contemplation of pleasant ones.<sup>438</sup> Śāntideva also uses this kind of rhetoric in some famous passages from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Śāntideva explains that we mistake our best teachers for our enemies. If we were wise, we would recognize that enemies benefit us.<sup>439</sup> As *The Six Condensed Points* asserts, enemies teach us patience. And when they harm us, they purify our bad karma, allowing our past misdeeds to come to fruition.

Beyond the renunciation rhetoric evident in this life-advice passage, we also find the stanzas apply condensation rhetoric. *The Six Condensed Points* are the “essential profound advice,” the “essence of the heart.”<sup>440</sup> As should now be familiar, the stanzas claim that a short series of life-advice instructions constitute the most essential, important teachings. The simple suggestions, condensed into the “six words” (alluding to his six instructions about happiness, praise, a high social position, wealth, gifts, and friends) are the key to all of one’s pursuits of the religious life: whether one is living in a solitary retreat or one is roaming around the world.

What interests us most about this life-advice, however, is Kunzang Palden’s choice to insert the stanzas into Patrul’s biography at the very moment that Patrul is about to leave his inherited position as head of the Palge estate. For Kunzang Palden, this life-advice composition is not simply a series of rhetorically rich verses meant to transmit life-lessons to their audience. Rather, they are a personal statement on Patrul’s part that explains his decision to leave his home monastery.

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<sup>438</sup> Śīṣyalekkha, verses 88–89, in Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 110/111.

<sup>439</sup> See *Bodhicaryāvatāra* chapter 6, verses 48–49, for example. Shantideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 85; The Tibetan for verses 48–49 read as follows in the Sde dge edition of the Bstan 'gyur: 'di dag la ni rten bcas nas/ bzod pas bdag sdiḡ mang du 'byang/ bdag la brten nas de dag ni/ yun ring sdug bsngal dmyal bar 'dong/ bdag ni de la gnod byed la/ de dag bdag la phan 'dogs na/ phyin ci log tu ci yi phyir/ ma rungs sems khyod khro bar byed/ Zhi ba lha, *Spyod pa la 'jug pa*, 32.

<sup>440</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 195–6: “gdams zab gnad,” “snying gi snying po.”



There are a number of levels to this interpretation by Kunzang Palden. He explicitly claims that Patrul left his monastic inheritance in order to practice the life of asceticism in accordance with the behavior described in *The Six Condensed Points*:

Unerringly applying to practice just what is said here, this great master, in the manner of a renunciant ascetic, left indefinitely to [go to] solitary places, and so on.<sup>441</sup>

Kunzang Palden understands Patrul's speech to be consistent with a broader outlook on life. He concludes that Patrul decided to leave his stable life as an incarnate lama, with an inherited property and elite social role, for the life of a wandering ascetic. Kunzang Palden interprets this decision, in light of the life-advice stanzas just quoted, as a manifestation of Patrul's negative attitude towards positions of status. As Patrul declares in the stanzas, "a high position is good, a low position is not good." For Kunzang Palden, the stanzas suggest that Patrul left his life at the Palge Labrang because of his concern over the negative consequences of his status as a property-inheriting incarnate lama. Kunzang Palden thereby uses the content of Patrul's discourse as a resource through which to interpret the motivations of Patrul the historical figure. For Kunzang Palden, Patrul's decision to renounce his inheritance as the Palge incarnation follows from the attitudes articulated in his life-advice works. As Patrul's biographer and as his personal disciple, Kunzang Palden presents Patrul the human being as an embodiment of Patrul's teachings. This interpretation depicts Patrul as a man of integrity, who follows what he preaches.

Incidentally, the very idea of following what one preaches is itself a theme in some of Patrul's works. Elsewhere, Patrul parses the honest person (*drang po*) as

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<sup>441</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 196: *ces gsungs pa ji lta ba bzhin 'phrul ba med par lag len du bstar bas bdag nyid chen po 'dis kun spang kun tu rgyu'i tshul gyis dben ba'i gnas sogs ches med du phebs te/*

someone whose mental intentions align with his speech.<sup>442</sup> Matching one's practices with one's teachings is also one of four traditional techniques for attracting students in Sanskrit theorizations of the path, categories to which Patrul explicitly appeals in his discussion of the ideal teacher in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*.<sup>443</sup>

### **Patrul's Discourse as Performance of the Self**

Kunzang Palden reads Patrul to have taken his own advice—to have treated his own teachings as guides for how to live his life. I would like to build on Kunzang Palden's interpretation, moving the analysis in a slightly different direction. Like Kunzang Palden, I read Patrul's advice compositions as a resource for their author. But, rather than focusing only on their normative content (as suggestions for self-improvement), I propose that we consider how the very writing of self-reflexive advice works may have been, itself, a form of self-development for Patrul.

In chapters 2-4, this dissertation has explored how Patrul's advice works function as technologies of persuasion, guiding their implied audience members to improve themselves through the adoption of various essential practices of self-development. I would now like to consider the ways in which the composition of these very same works may have acted as a mode for Patrul, himself, to engage in self-development. In my reading, these works may not only have been attempts to guide others, but were likewise exercises for Patrul to cultivate himself.

Specifically, Patrul's advice compositions served as opportunities through which Patrul could fashion himself as a Buddhist teacher—as a bodhisattva. These

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<sup>442</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 273-4.

<sup>443</sup> Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 138; Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 7, 222. The four qualities that attract students (*slob ma bsdu ba'i dngos po bzhi*) are: generosity (*sbyin pa*), pleasant speech (*snyan par smra ba*), teaching according to students' needs (*don spyod pa*), and acting in accordance with one's teaching (*don mthun pa*).

works are thereby technologies for Patrul's own self-becoming. They create an opportunity for Patrul to imagine himself as a skillful teacher and provide him with a narrative through which he can construct his own life as defined by the skillful transmission of ethical instructions.<sup>444</sup>

How might I defend such an interpretation? This reading of Patrul's advice compositions grows out of my treatment in chapter 1 of Patrul's experimentations with his career and his writings. To summarize, we know a good deal about Patrul's personal concern with the art of composition from the knowledge we have about his education and the record he left in his own writings. We know that Patrul studied the traditional Indian arts of exposition, studying grammar with the preeminent grammarian Shechen Önrul as a young man, and spending significant time learning poetics.<sup>445</sup> Patrul's interest in poetics is manifest in his commentary on Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* and his short work on metrics.<sup>446</sup>

Patrul was not only trained in formal aspects of composition, but he also was curious about the proper way to deliver public orations. His collected works include a teaching that lays out short examples of such socially acceptable, skillful speech, tailored to specific social contexts.<sup>447</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Patrul also reflected on the risks and benefits of different modes of public discourse in the introduction to his

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<sup>444</sup> For an alternative study of the complex relationship between Tibetan writing and self-figuration (even of an acknowledgedly "empty" subject) see Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, especially 211-242, 268-269.

<sup>445</sup> Kun bzang dpal ldan, "Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud," 192.

<sup>446</sup> See *Snyan ngag me long gi mngon brjod rna ba'i gling bu* and *Sdeb sbyor gyi man ngag rin chen phreng ba* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

<sup>447</sup> See *Nyams ldan sogs kha shas kyi rtsom dpe* in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

history of the dharma in Tibet.<sup>448</sup> These data points suggest that Patrul took the art of composition and public discourse quite seriously.

The self-reflexive works of advice that we have studied further support this interpretation of Patrul as a figure actively interested in the exercise of skillful composition and public teaching. His *Discourse of the Outcast Sage* presents itself as a performance in which the speaker of advice, the cave-bound sage, strives to impress his visitors with his cogent responses to their questions. *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* addresses itself to the category of “confident eloquence,” attends to the question of how to evaluate public discourse, and describes in detail the qualities of a capable teacher. Given Patrul’s training in the arts of composition, and his plentiful written work on issues of teaching and public speech, it is more than reasonable to conclude that the generation of eloquent discourse was a significant focus of his life.

Patrul’s affection for composition mirrors his concern for reaching a wide variety of audiences. We know, from accounts of his life, that Patrul committed himself to teaching in a wide variety of settings. He taught in monastic colleges, writing scholastic commentaries and analytical outlines of authoritative treatises suitable for consumption by students in this context. He likewise wrote intimate instructions for his close disciples, some of whom traveled with him during his long retreats from institutional life. He also taught and composed works for laypeople, from aristocrats in Derge to nomads throughout Northern Kham. As I argue in chapter 1, there is a direct correlation between the diversity of forms of writing about the path to liberation that Patrul engaged in and the wide variety of audiences to whom he taught.

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<sup>448</sup> Chos 'byung 'bel gtam nyung ngu in Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1.

As I will argue to towards the conclusion of this chapter, Patrul's advice compositions themselves also speak to the value he placed in teaching to wide audiences. It is therefore a point of record that Patrul concerned himself with skillful teaching and composition for diverse audiences. I would suggest that this interest can be read into the reflexive devices that we studied in chapters 2-4. The different author-positions that Patrul establishes in his work (the teacher speaking to himself, the witty sage, the precocious youth) serve rhetorical functions in these compositions. In addition, I read these diverse acts of self-positioning as further proof of Patrul the historical author's curiosity about how to be a skillful teacher for different audiences.

The diverse author-functions in these works serve as opportunities for Patrul to imagine himself in a variety of modes. The different rhetorical characters that appear as speakers in Patrul's works are, in this interpretation, diverse costumes for Patrul to put on. To the extent that Patrul was interested in skillful teaching to diverse audiences, so too would I argue that he was interested in diverse teacher-positions. Patrul's life-advice compositions are mechanisms for such positions to come into being. They are technologies for the very construction of these diverse "Patruls."

### **Performance as Subjectivity Production**

According to this reading of Patrul's self-reflexive compositions, Patrul's status as a skillful teacher is a product of his performances of masterful and witty instructions carried out by the "characters" that appear in his works. As Judith Butler argues, performances are not created by pre-formed performers, but rather constitute the performers.<sup>449</sup> Performances (as reiterations of social norms) constitute performers (in

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<sup>449</sup> Hollywood, "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization," 94.

her work gendered subjects), rather than the other way around. The human subject becomes a subject in so far as it repeatedly performs its roles.

It is through the performances of advice that I understand Patrul to constitute himself as a capable teacher. Patrul's advice writing thus participates in the creation of "Patrul" the skillful guru. Patrul's performances do not create one, single, identifiable "Patrul," however. They create the performer in the eyes of the audience—the model author that we have examined in chapters 2-4. But they may also mold Patrul's identity as a spiritual guide for himself. His performances help to constitute his "teacher-subjectivity," a way of being that extends beyond the confines of his texts.

As Brian Stock has argued, for Saint Augustine reading became a dominant mode for self-reflection (a context for self-reflection that exerted enormous influence over the subsequent development of Western modes of subjectivity).<sup>450</sup> In an analogous way, we might say that for Patrul, the very composition and performance of rhetorically rich advice works provided an opportunity for his own self-reflection. These texts, in other words, served as an arena for him to reflect on his status as a *bodhisattva*, and to construct a variety of identities as a Buddhist teacher.

### **Subjectivity Formation In *Water, Boats, Bodies***

How might this reading of advice composition as a practice of self-imagining, affect our interpretation of *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies*? I would argue that Patrul (the character responsible for the water-boats-bodies etymology) appears in the composition in order to represent, for both his audience *and* himself, the ideal social position of an eloquent teacher. The following therefore examines what it would

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<sup>450</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader*.

mean for *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* to act as a vehicle for the self-construction of Patrul as teacher.

The work paints a flattering portrait of Patrul, the original source of the “water-boats-bodies” etymology, as a confident, eloquent, and authoritative teacher who is both capable of engaging with educated elites on their own terms, yet also adept at teaching a wide audience in a way that the elites cannot match. The work articulates a dissatisfaction with the discursive ideals of the conservative-minded old monks by juxtaposing their staid explanations of the words “heard” and “understood” with the youth’s creative etymology of “water-boats-bodies.” It likewise contrasts the elites’ ineffectual critique of the “water-boats-bodies” etymology with the youth’s colorful defense of Patrul’s brilliance. In each case, the composition positions Patrul as vastly superior in wit and skill to the old men.

One issue at stake in the criticism of these monastic elites, obsessed as they are with scholastic pursuits of formal composition and debate, is their incapacity to reach a wide audience with their teachings. The composition’s interest in reaching the widest possible audience is evident in its treatment of the popular six-syllable mantra of Avalokiteśvara, “*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*.”

The youth introduce the *maṇi* in order to draw a parallel between the six-syllable *maṇi* (*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*) and the three-syllable “water-boats-bodies” (*chu gru lus*). In a brilliant sleight of hand, having just discussed the “six-syllable *maṇi*” and its fame in Tibet, the youth jump right into a discussion of the “three-syllabled” “water-boats-bodies” teaching. The youth refer to the *maṇi* as: “this six-syllable ‘*maṇi peme*’” (Tib.: *'bru drug ma ṇi padme 'di*), then, only a few lines later, refer to the phrase “water-

boats-bodies” as: “*rtsa ba tshig 'bru gsum po de*” (that root word or root phrase in three syllables).<sup>451</sup>

And what of this “three-syllabled” root teaching, “water-boats-bodies”? The youth claim it to have been transmitted from ear to ear in the past, just like the *maṇi*. While the old men might not have heard of the “water-boats-bodies” teaching prior to meeting the youth, the youth claim that this teaching has nonetheless traveled far and wide, much like the *maṇi*. Far from being just a phrase of youthful slang, the youth talk about the phrase “water-boats-bodies” as if it were itself a *mantra*, or as a secret teaching of some sort.<sup>452</sup>

In a pattern that should now be familiar, the parallel treatment of the *maṇi* and “water-boats-bodies” is both playful and serious. There is clearly some irony in the assertion that the “water-boats-bodies” teaching has spread from ear to ear like the *maṇi* has. A colloquial expression meaning “nothing” is hardly the religious equivalent of the renowned mantra of the Bodhisattva of compassion. In this regard, the comparison of the two, the three-syllable “water-boats-bodies” and the six-syllable mantra, is a witty joke, appropriate for a humorous discourse (*bzhad gad kyi gdam*).

But *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* is also asserting something quite important about the value of a good teaching. While scholars may be too busy writing arcane commentaries to be bothered by popular practices such as chanting the mantra of compassion, the majority of Tibetans are engaged in just these kinds of practices. Perhaps these popular practices are no less profound than scholastic commentaries. As the youth assert, the *maṇi* is the very essence of all of the Buddha’s teachings.

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<sup>451</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 349-50.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 350.



This section of the text establishes that Patrul (as the named source of the ‘water-boats-bodies’ etymology), unlike the scholastic elites represented by the old men, is capable of creating teachings like the *mani* that are accessible to the majority of Tibetans. Teachings that resemble the etymology of “water-boats-bodies,” the text seems to suggest, are the kinds of teachings that are capable of mass appeal—they are easy to remember, yet filled with hidden profundity.

The concern for teaching all types of people is a common, if oblique, theme throughout *The Exposition of Water, Boats, and Bodies*. During their explication of the meaning of “boats” (*gru*), the youth state that boats ferry all kinds of people: merchants, women, monks, gurus, *brahmans*, thieves, butchers, and so on. And when drawing out the parallel between boats’ function and the youth’s own activities, the youth mention that they meet all sorts of different people on their travels, sometimes men, sometimes women, and sometimes children.<sup>453</sup> Boats, on a figurative level, and the youth, on a literal level, engage with all segments of the population. I interpret this motif as evidence for the work’s concern that confident and eloquent teachings be available to a wide variety of audiences. In this way, the text presents Patrul as a model on par with some of the historical Patrul’s heroes, such as Karma Chagme and Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, both of whom were known for their popular teachings to audiences of all educational levels.<sup>454</sup> The conservative scholars, on the other hand, are depicted as people who are too concerned with scholastic practices (like formal word-commentaries to canonical scriptures) to value accessible instructions.

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 344-5.

<sup>454</sup> Patrul composed a prayer for the quick rebirth of Shabkar that appears in his collected works. See “Zhabs dkar sprul sku myur 'byon” in *Rdza dpal sprul*, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8. Patrul’s biography also tells of how Patrul set out to meet Shabkar, intent to learn from this highly reputed master, before learning on the road that Shabkar had died. Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 197.

Yet the *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* is careful in its critique of the elders. It maintains the importance of various capacities of educated monks, specifically their skill in debate and their knowledge of scriptures, both skills that one develops through monastic study. One might say the same of the text's attitude towards Sakya Paṇḍita, whose conservative legacy appears to be an object of some ridicule in this text (though Sapan is never named). Patrul, the historical author, clearly did respect Sapan's high standards for monastic learning. Patrul is quoted in his biography praising Sakya Paṇḍita for his skill in the five traditional fields of learning, for example.<sup>455</sup>

*The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* also portrays the common activities of educated monks in a positive light. His protagonists, the youth, perform some of the social duties of monks, such as participating in rituals to benefit benefactors and praying for the recently deceased. The text, it seems, presents the ideal teacher as someone at once scholastically trained, socially engaged, and capable of communicating confidently and skillfully to a wide audience.

The text presents Patrul, the supposed originator of the “water-boats-bodies” creative-etymology, as enjoying the best of both worlds. He is someone who is not limited by the constraints of scholastic discourse yet is still capable of operating within the world of monastically trained scholars. So, for example, it claims him to be beyond the requirements of quoting from scripture or engaging in debate. Because of the genius of his confidently eloquent preaching and the thoroughness of his education, these requirements do not apply to him. Still, were he to choose to support his

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<sup>455</sup> See Kun bzang dpal ldan, “Bdud rtsi'i bum bcud,” 193. This section of the biography also alludes to Patrul's non-sectarian approach, here noting the respect he held for Longchenpa (Rnying ma), Sapan (Sakya), and Tsong Khapa (Geluk).

teachings with scriptural quotations or participate in debate, he could do so with ease.<sup>456</sup>

The text also presents its heroes as occupying a privileged position with respect to the social world—living neither an ordinary, mundane life nor abandoning all connections to their fellow people. The protagonists of the story, the youth, are at once full participants in the social world and yet entirely unaffected by it. They are engaged with their neighbors, they travel amongst commoners, converse with them, and heal them. Yet, as the “water-boats-bodies” allegory so elegantly expresses, the youth are capable of interacting with the world without being changed by it. Like water, they accomplish their aims without being stained or diminished.

The text’s concern for respecting the elite education of monks while nonetheless criticizing their conservative approach to public discourse reflects the complex nature of Patrul’s own real-life status as a religious figure in nineteenth-century Eastern Tibet. As investigated in chapter 1, Patrul’s career was multifaceted, even conflicted. He was recognized as an incarnate lama at an early age and thereby inherited a monastic estate, privileged social status, and the guarantee of an elite religious education. Yet, as a young man, he rejected his monastic inheritance, leaving his monastery to lead the life of a wandering ascetic (at least for a short time). But Patrul also spent much time traveling to the major monasteries of Eastern Tibet as both student and later teacher, and thereby retained strong institutional connections to a number of important monasteries in Eastern Tibet. He received a traditional monastic education at Dzogchen monastery, and studied with many of the great scholars of his

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<sup>456</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 349–50.

day. Later he even became a scholastic instructor and the abbot of a monastic college at Dzogchen, where he assembled analytical outlines of canonical treatises meant for use in scholastic study.<sup>457</sup> Yet he nonetheless frequently wrote of his skepticism of a life devoted to scholastic study and composition.<sup>458</sup>

Patrul was a friend and consoler to the elite in Derge, having composed advice for some of them, yet was also a populist teacher to nomads and villagers throughout Khams. He was, at times, both a forest-dwelling hermit and an administrator at a major monastery, a self-effacing renunciant and an iconoclastic performer. Patrul's career was a never-ending negotiation within a network of conflicting social positions.

Perhaps, then, we should read *The Explanation of Water, Boats, and Bodies* as a means for Patrul of fashioning a set of personal aspirations as a teacher—his desire to embody the pedagogical skills of a bodhisattva, to employ his considerable education, training, wit and creativity in the service of creating profound teachings for beings of all capacity, while all the while remaining inoculated from the dangerous and harmful emotions, the hopes and the fears that characterize worldly life.

We can thereby productively read *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* as one example of how advice compositions are themselves sites of self-development for their authors. They are a means for the creation of one's self-identity. In this vein, *The*

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<sup>457</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Patrul was educated at Dzogchen monastery (*Rdzogs chen dgon*) outside of Derge, spent many years in retreat caves surrounding the monastery, and later taught at Dzogchen's monastic college and affiliate monasteries. Patrul's accomplished teachers included Rdzog chen rgyal sras Gzhan phan mtha' yas (1800-1855), Rdzogs chen Mi 'gyur nam mkha'i rdo rje (1793-1870), and Zhe chen dbon sprul Mthu stobs rnam rgyal (b. 1787). For Patrul's analytical outlines, see Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 2.

<sup>458</sup> Patrul's "life-advice" compositions are replete with rhetoric declaring the uselessness of scholarly pursuits and criticism of all-talk but no-substance monks, though these statements often appear in sections that strive to motivate the audience to renounce all worldly pursuits and escape to a cave for solitary retreat practice. These passages would therefore demand careful interpretation with attention to the context of Patrul's loaded rhetoric. See for example, however, Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 8, 128, 275, 278.

*Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* is Patrul's own self-development work. Patrul (the historical author) imagines himself—through the characters of his work—as enjoying the best of both worlds. He portrays the youth as embodying the engaged social practitioner, who acts to benefit all. The youth are representative *bodhisattvas*. Yet, they are free from the negative qualities that come with a social life. They practice a life of detachment, without being changed at all by their interactions with others.

According to this reading, *The Explanation of Water, Boats and Bodies* is about imagining possibilities for Patrul's audience as well as for himself. The work is thereby an aspirational text: a text through which Patrul, the historical author, constructs his own ideal subjectivity as an insightful, capable, engaged, and trustworthy teacher.

In that respect, the text is not entirely dissimilar from a dissertation: a work by which a graduate student may enact an aspiration of becoming. Where the process of composition itself, with its various gestures for establishing one's authority and trustworthiness as a textual heremeneut and responsible scholar, creates the very subjectivity to which the author aspires: being a PhD. scholar.

## Appendix I: Translations

### *The Explanation of Water, Boats & Bodies*

The explanation of water-boats-bodies:

Reverence to you, Gentle Protector, sun of the heart; who possesses the thorough and perfect knowledges of phenomena and their meaning, confident eloquence and the etymology of words; reverence to you.

Here it [the explanation of water-boats-bodies] is to be explained.

At one time, some old people were resting on the ground in relaxation, and some young people passed by [going off] in different directions for the purpose of doing some errands. Having gone, and having completed whichever of their various errands that they had to do, they once again came back.

The old men thereby asked them,

“Young men who should live many years, what have you heard, what have you understood, what is there for you to explain?”<sup>459</sup>

The youth said,

“Elders, we haven’t heard anything, understood anything, there is nothing to be explained, not even “water-boats-bodies.”<sup>460</sup>

The old men said,

“Youngsters, we understood some of the meaning of what you said. Some we did not understand.

“Namely, with regard to ‘heard’: we asked if there was any conversation in the various places [to which you traveled] that you heard in your ear passages. To that you said there was not. That much we understood.

“With regard to ‘understood’: [we asked] whether you had attained certainty with respect to something when you thought ‘this is just this way,’ on the basis of someone

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<sup>459</sup> Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2003, vol. 1, 342: *a bu dag/lo brgya dag/ci zhig ni thos/ci zhig ni go/bshad par bya ba ni ci zhig yod/* The phrase “youngsters, ones who should live many years” is a respectful way of addressing the youth.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., : *sku tshe lags/dgung lo lags/thos pa dang/go ba dang/bshad par bya ba ni chu gru lus kyang med do/* I chose not to translate literally the honorific forms of address used here for the elders (*sku tshe lags/dgung lo lags*), which loosely mean “ones who have a [long] life, a high age.”

hearing or seeing some activity of others. You said there was no such thing. That we also understood.

“However, when you youth said ‘there is nothing at all, not even water-boats-bodies,’ we did not understand that. What is that? Explain what that is.”

The youth said,

“While you comprehend well the meaning of ‘heard’ and ‘understood,’ we will elucidate the meaning of ‘not even water-boats-bodies’ by giving examples.”

The old men said,

“Youngsters, what is an example of ‘water-boats-bodies’? Explain how the meaning works.”

The youth said,

“There are three meanings of ‘water-boats-bodies’ and also three examples.

“Water is as follows:

“Water, which comes from the Great Ocean for the purpose of eliminating the stains and the thirst of the world, goes from place to place. Ultimately, it flows and falls back into the Great Ocean, which is the resting place for all water.<sup>461</sup> Still, that water has nothing at all added or taken away from it, nor is it sullied or stained. Just as it is when it leaves the Great Ocean, so too it is when it later returns again to the Great Ocean. And yet, on its way, different people drink it, bathe with it, transform it, and so on. So it appears.

“In the same way, we [the youth] leave our homes for various purposes, go to different places, meet different people in these places, talk about things, enjoy ourselves, and so on. Nevertheless, there is nothing that we newly understand that we have not heard, understood, or known before. It is just like the example of rivers. This is the first pair of example and meaning.

“Further, boats are as follows:

“For the purpose of transporting others, boats go from one side of the river to the other, and come back again, going and returning continually. Sometimes these boats transport merchants, sometimes other guests, sometimes women, monks, gurus, *brahmans*, thieves, butchers, and so on. But when they come back again, however they were before, they are still that way: they are not filled [with anything new] nor are they depleted. There is nothing to be done about the good or the bad [passengers]. While

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<sup>461</sup> This is a traditional Tibetan conception of the path of rivers: from the ocean, to the ocean.

[boats] exist just as they were before, they again, repeatedly, must go from the near side to the far side and from the far side to the near side.

“In the same way, we leave our homes and go to others’ homes and later come back to our own homes. In this way, we continually go out from our homes, return and so on; during that time, we sometimes meet and see men, sometimes women, and sometimes children. Still, we never understand or hear anything new from them that we had not understood or heard previously. In this example, just like boats, we again, repeatedly must go. This is the second [pair] of example and meaning.

“Further, the bodies of those ones are as follows:

“For the purpose of crossing over rivers, bodies enter into boats and emerge again out of the boats. Having [entered] into the boat, that person does not accomplish or gain anything at all. Nothing at all is left over or remains of that person in the boat.<sup>462</sup> The boat is just as it was before. The person is also just as he was before when he entered into and emerged out [of the boat]. Still, it is not the case that no purpose is accomplished when the person enters into the boat.

“Just like in this example, we also [go out from] our own homes, enter into others’, and reemerge. Still, there is absolutely nothing new to be explained that we have not understood or heard prior. [Still] it is not the case that we do not accomplish our own business. Therefore, that is the example of bodies entering into boats. This is the third [pair] of example and meaning.

“Furthermore, because water is the base, boats enter into water, and bodies enter into boats. Boats rest on water and bodies rest in boats. Because of that, the three examples of ‘water-boats-bodies’ are presented in order, according to the order of support and thing supported thereby.

“Also, for the purpose of temple ceremonies, or for the purpose of virtuous kindness towards people from different places who have become sick or who have died, we repeatedly attend gatherings of the monastic community, where we recite mantras, chant, meditate and so on. Sometimes, we also set out for some minor business of our own. We will therefore set forth three examples, in order, in relation to these pursuits.

“Going out for the purpose of temple ceremonies for a patron is connected with the example of rivers. Rivers eliminate the stains and thirst of beings and accomplish various benefits. They keep people alive and, in the end, enter into the Great Ocean. In the same way, [we] eliminate the stain of illness and activate the power of medicine and so on to get rid of the harm of demons, which is comparable to the thorn-like pain of thirst. [We] bring about various benefits and cause [the sick] to stay [alive] for a long

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<sup>462</sup> Here there is a pun on the word “body” (*lus*). *Lus*, in its nominal form, means a body. But, in verbal form (*lus pa*) it means to leave something behind as a remainder. *Lus* refers to the body that enters into the boat, and it refers to the fact that nothing is *left as remains* in the boat after each successive trip across the river.



time. At the end of all of that, by making a final dedication, [we] cause the [merit of this activity] to fall into the Ocean of Omniscience. Thereby these [facets of attending temple services for patrons] are connected to the example of rivers.

“Because of transferring the resting place of dead people, keeping [the dead] company<sup>463</sup> is connected to the example of boats. Guests, being on the near side [of a river], wish to go to the far side. Because a great river cuts off the path to that [far side], they are not able to go by their own power. For those like us and so on, by relying on the great boat of the noble community and the true *dharma*, it is easy to transfer the *bardo* consciousness, which is just like a person [stuck] in the middle of a river, and set it down on the dry land of liberation. Therefore, this [activity of transferring the consciousness of the recently deceased] is just like the example of a boat.

“Going out for the purpose of small, provisional business is connected to the example of bodies. One does not enter into a boat for the good of the river. Nor does one enter the boat for the good of the boat. Nor for anyone else. Rather, one puts one’s body into the boat only for the sake of oneself and for the sake of the hat and clothing that one is wearing. In this way, when we go out for the purpose of some small provisional business, we exclusively go out for the purpose of the small tasks of ours and those of friends of ours, like you, who depend on us. Therefore, [going out] for no other business than this is like the example of bodies.

“In terms of these three examples, while our own business and whatever business there is does exist, there are absolutely no other things beyond that to be understood, to be heard, or to be explained. In this way, in terms of the various purposes for which we go out to accomplish whatever business of ours that there is, beyond those there is absolutely nothing to be understood, to be heard, or to be explained. In this way, we present the three [respective] examples and meanings of ‘water-boats-bodies.’

“If you were to write down the meaning of ‘water-boats-bodies’  
You could use up all of the paper that there is in a store  
And all of the ink in the possession of a scholar  
Yet you would never use up our intelligence  
Nor would you use up the meaning of ‘water-boats-bodies.’<sup>464</sup>

The old men answered in response:<sup>465</sup>

“*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ.*  
To you who possesses the compassion of always looking  
With an eye towards the six realms of beings

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 346-7: *shi ba dag gnas sbor ba'i phyir 'grog ni gru'i dpe dang 'brel te/* I am reading 'grog ni as 'grogs ni, and interpreting 'grogs to be short for the verbal noun 'grogs pa, meaning the activity of keeping someone company.

<sup>464</sup> These five lines are in nine-syllable verse. The entire text up until this point, outside of the four opening lines of homage, have been in prose.

<sup>465</sup> The text proceeds from here until its conclusion in seven-syllable verse.

who always act to generate suffering;  
reverent homage to you, the protector.

“Some composers of tantric commentaries correctly affix meaningless grammatical particles and ornamental words to the true, root words of the *tantra*. The case of ‘water-boats-bodies’ is incompatible [with this approach]. In terms of looking for evidence that [you] composed the commentary in accord with the *tantra*, the ‘water-boats-bodies’ [etymology] does not use the support of any scriptural testimony, such as explanatory *tantras* and treatises. Having been written down with confusing words, the composition is [just] a heap of commentaries. Upon analysis, there are some contradictions, like the commentary and root [words] being disconnected. And no one has debated it. Please elaborate with an additional explanation.”

[The youth] responded to this:

“In general, since engaging in explanation, debate, and composition is indispensable for leaders of monasteries, you also have composed this polemical critique. Although you have done so, the explanation of ‘water-boats-bodies’ is [nonetheless] well known to scholars of superior monasteries. The composer, Gewai Pal,<sup>466</sup> is one whose intelligence gained from meditation is entirely lucid. Like the example of a butter flame inside a vase, he has the power to decide upon his own death.<sup>467</sup> It is not possible that he would be without confidence—knowing [as he does] that he can never be trampled in debate. Nor is it possible that he would ever speak nonsense. The composer of the commentary, Palgi Gewa, has the understanding gained from opening hundreds of texts and has the confident eloquence (*spobs pa*) of speaking hundreds of words. If he were to be the defendant in a debate, he would propose a firm thesis, as he has the intelligence to prove his assertion. If he were the opponent, he would engage in sharp debate, as he has the knowledge to destroy the assertions of the other. His intellect can take anything at all as its fuel, just like a burning bonfire.<sup>468</sup> He is [like] an elder of excellent intelligence. He is the master of one thousand disciples. He is like the embodiment of many scholars. Even more so, an example that came into being in his presence is extremely difficult to challenge.<sup>469</sup>

“The six-syllable *maṇi* is said to be the essence of the *dharma*. As for its spreading, it has spread throughout Tibet. As for being known, even old women know it. As for being

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<sup>466</sup> Gewai Pal (*dge ba'i dpal*) is an inversion of Patrul's name: Palge (*dpal dge*).

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 349: *dper na bum nang mar me 'dra/ kho thag nang nas chod de mchi/* The idea is that the butter-fueled flame is protected by the vase. No one can put it out. Rather, it burns out slowly, on its own. Patrul likewise is not subject to disturbance by others. He has the capacity to control his own fate.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.: *rig lam me dpung 'bar ba 'dra/ gang yang khong gi grogs su 'gro/* More literally, his intellect can take anything as its helper (*'grogs su 'gro*). Per Lobsang Shastri's suggestion, I am treating “*grogs*” figuratively as “fuel,” to better fit the metaphor of the bonfire that will burn anything thrown into it.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.: *dpe yang khong gi drung nas 'byung/ 'di la rgol du cis kyang dka/* I believe this “example” refers to his ‘water-boats-bodies’ etymology. The implication is that it is an analysis that he, himself, composed (it “came into being in his presence”). The idea is that, given all of the reasons just listed, it is very difficult to defeat Patrul in debate. The task is even more difficult if one is trying to discredit his own teaching.

recited, even beggars recite it. As for being written, even children know how to write it. For scholars who compose treatises [however], there is no entryway to the *maṇi*.<sup>470</sup>

“That root [teaching] in three syllables has, in the past, been transmitted from ear to ear. [But], not including the one who made the commentary [upon it], it is said that it has never been recorded in a book.

“In regards to [your] point that it [the etymological commentary] does not add grammatical endings, [the etymology] is the [teaching] to be established. It is not what establishes [the meaning of something else].<sup>471</sup>

“In regards to your assertion about the root-tantra<sup>472</sup> [the elders’ assertion that the etymological commentary did not properly relate to the root syllables *chu-gru-lus*], the relationship to the three—water, boats, bodies—has been asserted in various contexts. If you claim the contrary, it will be difficult to prove. Because of the [established] relationship, it [the etymology] is ‘a connection.’<sup>473</sup>

“The complete Kanjur and Tanjur are well known, like the wind.<sup>474</sup> [But] knowledge is that which corrects scripture.<sup>475</sup> It is well known to the many scholars in society that there is no need for scripture [scriptural quotations] over and above knowledge. Even if there were a need, he [Patrul] would have them [appropriate quotations].

“With respect to the arrangement of written words, there is a general custom of making commentaries on the Kanjur and Tanjur. [But] because some Nyingma and Bön

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<sup>470</sup> I interpret this to mean that scholars see no value in the *maṇi*.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 350: *de la sa mtha' med pa 'di/ bsgrub bya yin gyi sgrub byed min/* The idea is that Patrul does not waste time in his commentary adding grammatical particles—a commentarial practice that would serve to establish the meaning of a root text. Rather, Patrul’s commentary is itself the meaning to be sought. His etymology is the *bsgrub bya*—the thing to be proven. It is not the *sgrub byed*—a point used to prove something else. As can be seen from my many additions in brackets, this section of the composition is extremely terse. The composition refers back to the earlier arguments offered by the elders without restating them in full sentences. The youth’s counterarguments are likewise elliptical and somewhat opaque.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.: *rtsa ba rgyud*

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.: *'brel pa'i phyir na rgyud do zhes/* Patrul’s punning on the word *rgyud* (tantra) becomes clear in this context. The word *rgyud*, while generally referring to *mantrayāna* root texts (tantras) upon which scholars write commentaries, also has the meaning of “a connection.” While the etymology of ‘water-boats-bodies’ is, of course, not at all like a commentary on a root-tantra, it is, in fact, a demonstration of a “connection,” namely Patrul’s capacity to make connections between the syllables and his eloquent interpretations.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.: *bka' bstan yongs la rlung ltar grags/* The canonical collections are like the wind in that they travel everywhere, meaning that they are known to people all over. This section concerns the elders’ critique that the youth had not quoted any scriptures in their etymology.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.: *lung gi dag byed rig pa ni/* Patrul is arguing that quotations are not necessary, as long as the commentator has knowledge (or intelligence, or fundamental awareness, or all of these at once; Tib: *rig pa*). This is so because knowledge is that which is used to understand scriptures. This sentence again appeals to a pun. “*Lung gi dag byed*” means “that which corrects scripture.” But it also contains two puns for the wind. “*Dag byed*” (“that which makes pure”) is a figurative term for “wind”; and *lung* is a homonym for *rlung* (“wind”). Through the use of puns, Patrul compares his knowledge to scripture—both are like the wind, unlimited in their breadth.

approaches have the [tendency to] show practice to be the method, it is not otherwise.<sup>476</sup>

“Furthermore, if there are many contradictions [in the etymology, as the elders claim] to be elaborated, who will elaborate them? If there are not, it would be foolish to hold a debate.

“May it be auspicious! May it be auspicious! May it be auspicious!”<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid.: *tshig byas nag 'gros bkod pa de/ bka' bstan 'grel byed spyi yi srol/ phyag len thabs su sprad pa zhig/ rnying bon cho ga 'ga' zhig la/ yod par srid kyis gzhan du min/* This statement is somewhat obscure. The idea seems to be that Patrul's method of commentary, which itself emphasizes practice over and against formal, scholastic obsession with textual interpretation, is preferable. His commentary, in this sense, is not simply an arrangement of words, but rather a skillful practice instruction (or, per my interpretation in chapter 5, itself a form of practice).

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.: *dge'o/ dge'o/ dge'o/*

## *The Discourse of the Outcast Sage*

*A Treatise on Dharmic and Worldly Knowledge: The Discourse of an Outcast Sage, The Ladder to Liberation*

Homage to Lokeśvara<sup>478</sup>—who in the time of *Bhairava* tamed the three realms,<sup>479</sup> [and] subdued that time [with] the sounds of soft melody.<sup>480</sup> In the palace endowed with that [sound] rests the one who has the means to discipline savages, in forms resplendent and peaceful: the outcast sage. May his name<sup>481</sup> resound for good fortune.<sup>482</sup>

While he has no wealth, he has good speech. Therefore, everyone comes to him to ask things. He, in turn, skillfully offers them advice.

Someone asked him,

“Hey! Great sage, what are ‘*dharma* traditions?’ How do you divide *dharma* traditions? Which *dharma* traditions do you reject? Which *dharma* traditions to you accept?”<sup>483</sup>

He said,

“*Dharma* is everything to be known. Tradition is the defining characteristic of that. *Dharma* are the things to be taken up and forsaken. Tradition is the practice of that.

“If you divide the *dharma* of what is to be known, it is the two of the cycle of suffering and liberation. If you divide the *dharma* of what is to be taken up and what to be forsaken, it is the two of virtue and wrongdoing.

“The first [the cycle of suffering and liberation] is two: pacifying suffering and not pacifying it. The latter [virtue and wrongdoing] is two: producing suffering and not producing it.

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<sup>478</sup> The Tibetan for this challenging opening stanza is as follows: *na mo lo ke shva ra ye/ gang gis kham gsum kham zas su/ byed pa 'jigs byed dus zhes bya/ dus kyang 'joms pa 'jam dpa'i dbyangs/ sgra dang ldan pa'i pho brang nas/ gtum po dul ba'i tshul 'dzin cing/ 'bar ba zhi ba'i rnam pa can/ gdol ba'i drang srong de gnas te/ de yi ming ni shrī zhes grags/ Rdza dpal sprul, Gsung 'bum 2003, 272.*

<sup>479</sup> *kham gsum kham zas su byed pa*. I am taking “*kham zas su byed pa*” to mean “tame” based on context, per the kind suggestion of Lobsang Shastri. Literally, this curious phrase means “a small portion of food,” which would perhaps render the phrase as “he who fed the three realms . . .”

<sup>480</sup> In my reading, this is a pun. Patrul is both stating that Avalokiteśvara subdues this dark period with sweet soundings teachings, and is referring to another bodhisattva: Mañjughoṣa (‘Jam pa’i dbyangs).

<sup>481</sup> The name in question is probably Lokeśvara, not the sage (who, per my analysis in chapter 3, is closely affiliated with Patrul the author). The Tibetan is ambiguous, however. Perhaps all of the names that appear in this opening stanza—Lokeśvara, Bhairava, Mañjughoṣa, and the Outcast Sage—are to bring good fortune.

<sup>482</sup> This opening stanza displays Patrul’s facility with *kāvya* (poetic) style, most notably his comfort with alliteration. Lines 2-5 all feature heaving alliteration: “Kang kee kham sum kham se soo/ che ba jig che du she cha/ doo chang jom ba jam bey yangs/ dra tang dan pey pho drang ney.”

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 272: *chos dang lugs zhes bya ba ci/ chos dang lugs kyi dbye ba gang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag spang/ chos dang lugs la gang dag blang/*

“Amongst those, the cycle of suffering is to be rejected. If one has not rejected wrongdoing—the cause of the cycle of suffering—it is not possible to reject the cycle of suffering. Therefore, first reject wrongdoing.

“Liberation is to be taken up. If one has not achieved virtue, it is not possible to take up liberation. Therefore, first take up virtue.

“Even though the cycle of suffering is to be rejected, if one does not first rely upon the *dharma* of the cycle of suffering, it is not possible to enter the path of liberation. First, it is important to know the nature of the cycle of suffering.

“There are two great paths in this cycle of suffering. They are the straight and the crooked. Via the straight [path] one goes on to become a god and a human being. Via the crooked path, the bad rebirths. Were many people to act straight in this realm, the divine realm above would fill. Were many people to act crookedly in this realm, the bad rebirths below would greatly increase.

“The straight is known as the tradition of human *dharma*. If one is exceedingly straight, that is the tradition of divine *dharma*. The crooked is the tradition of the *dharma* of degenerate activity. The exceedingly crooked is the *dharma* tradition of hell-beings.

“The straight—what is it? [It is] having completely rejected deceitfulness, having aligned one’s mouth with one’s meaning, and having aligned the outside with the inside. One’s mouth is one’s spoken talk. Meaning is the practice of that. The outside is body and speech. The inside is one’s mind.

“With respect to meaning: for the crooked, while the mouth is straight the inside is crooked, the outside is [still] straight. By means of that, the crooked is covered over [hidden] by the straight. This is the degenerate *dharma* tradition.

“By rejecting deceitfulness in the mind, this alone is straight activity. This is the supreme tradition of human *dharma*. All human *dharma* is collected together in this [point].

“The thought of desire is the crooked. Minimizing desire is the straight. If one rejects accomplishing the goals arisen from one’s own desires, that is the tradition of divine *dharma*.

“All degenerate beings act hypocritically with their crooked bodies; they speak deceitfully with their crooked utterances; they conjure up deceptions with their crooked minds. All desiring people are included in these [points]. By means of these [activities] one will not achieve one’s desires. Gods and sages shun these [activities]. A bad rebirth is not far from them.

“The exceedingly crooked is acting to hurt others. They hide their true intentions and have deceitful minds. Having rejected all paths of virtuous activity, they will burn in the blazing fires of hell below the earth.

“In this way, one rejects and accepts the *dharma* of the cycle of suffering.

“Knowing that, one remains in straight activity. Because of that, true liberation should be obtained. The cause of that [liberation] is the supreme teaching of the Conqueror.

“The teaching of the Conqueror has two [parts]: scripture and realization. Scripture is the *dharma* that has been explained; realization is the accomplishment of the meaning of that: the three scripture baskets and the three trainings [respectively].

“The precious *vinaya*, *sūtras* and *abhidharma* are the three scripture baskets of the Sage. These are the *dharma* of scripture, the *dharma* that has been explained. The words and meaning of these are what is to be heard and reflected upon.

“The precious conduct, concentration and wisdom are the three trainings of the sons of the Conqueror. These are the *dharma* of realization, the *dharma* of accomplishment. These three are to be practiced and meditated upon.

“One does not know all of the three scripture baskets of the Sage. If one knows the meaning of one word, that [constitutes] the teaching of scripture. Although it is difficult to complete all of the three trainings of the Sons of the Conquerors, even arousing one moment of a virtuous mental state, even this is the teaching of realization. Therefore, if one desires to grasp the teaching of the Conqueror, search for the teaching on the outside, and accomplish it internally. If one accomplishes it internally, the teaching will subdue one’s mind. If one’s mind is subdued, that is liberation.

“In this way, rejecting and accepting the cycle of suffering and liberation is taking up and abandoning virtue and wrongdoing. Still, for the purpose of distilling the essential point of practice, listen and accomplish [realization] by means of [the following] explanation of rejecting and taking up virtue and wrongdoing.

“Virtue is a mental conceptualization. Wrongdoing is also a mental conceptualization. Although one may ascertain the external absence of virtue and wrongdoing, you should seek virtue and wrongdoing in relation to the mind. If one’s mind is virtuous, body and speech are also virtuous. If one’s mind does wrong, body and speech also do wrong. Therefore, the root of all *dharma* is said to be the mind.

“The Supreme Sage said, with respect to the method for training the mind:  
‘In every time, look at your own mind. At every moment, look at your own mind. In a moment of non-distraction, look at your own mind. At this instant, look at your own

mind. In times when many people are gathered, and at times when you are alone, in these times, practice<sup>484</sup> in this way.’

“After having made a vow to act virtuously, establish mindful attention. In completion [of these steps], at every time look at your own mind.

“When eating, and lying down, and going, and walking, and sitting; in all paths of activity, apprehend the mind with mindful attention. Having rejected both the absence of purpose and desire, with awareness, at every moment look at your own mind.

“This mental conceptualization is absent of all extremes. Grasp conceptualization—which is uninhibited and [should] not [be] cast away—with the hook of mindfulness. Without rejecting or accepting, let thoughts be liberated by themselves. In a moment of non-distraction, look at your own mind in this way.

“Moreover, even though it is correct to hold tight to mindfulness which looks at the mind since beginners have many distractions, the way that one’s own mind becomes distracted and mistaken should itself be investigated. At this instant, look at your mind in this way.

“If one meditates, looking at the mind, one will come to know the secret essential point of the mind. If one comes to know the secret essential point of the mind, one knows the very nature of all phenomena. The very nature of all phenomena is the nature of the mind. The way it is is ineffable. If one analyzes, knowing is far away. If there is nothing to be analyzed, how can one realize? Realizing and analyzing are mere conventions. Beyond conventions is the ultimate meaning. If one knows that, it is what is called liberation.

“Hey friends! Look at your own mind. Virtue and wrongdoing, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are contained in one’s own mind. There, there is no body or speech at all. Subduing one’s own mind is the teaching of the Buddha.

Again, someone asked:

“Articulate the divisions of the three objects of refuge and the three vows and the three vehicles. Explain how to condense each of the three categories into one. Show how [each] one can be sewn up into an essential point.”

He said:

“He who is not mistaken is the teacher. He teaches the good path that is unmistakable. The teacher who leads beings from the depths of *saṃsāra*, he is the refuge of the Buddha.

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 276: ‘*di ltar bya*. Literally, “do it this way.”



“That which does not deceive is the teaching. If one practices in accordance with the words [of the Buddha], you will not be deceived. The protector that leads beings along the correct path is the refuge of the true *dharma*.

“He who is not separated is the practitioner. Not being separated from the meaning of the teachings—when one depends on that, one will become like that. [Such] a guide is the refuge of the *saṅgha*.

“The teacher is the Buddha and that which protects is the true *dharma*. The guide is the great *saṅgha*. Liberation is the desired refuge.

“In regards to this, what can you rely on unfailingly at all times? The perfect three objects of refuge are asserted to be that.

“*Saṃsāra* is the house of suffering. Because of this, suffering is never not produced. The state of mind<sup>485</sup> that desires to be liberated from that [suffering] is the vow of individual liberation.

“All beings in the three realms are one’s father and mother. There are none who have not cared for [you] with kindness. The state of mind that desires the method to bring enlightenment to them all is the *bodhisattva* vow.

“The world and its inhabitants are a pure field. They never appear as impure. Knowing the phenomenal world to be a *maṇḍala* circle is the secret-*mantra* vow.

“Renunciation is the [vow] of individual liberation. Benefitting others is the *bodhisattva* [vow]. Pure vision is the secret-*mantra* [vow]. Restraining [the activities] of harming others, focusing on one’s own needs, and thinking conceptually by [assigning mistaken] qualities [to things] is set forth, in this way, as the three perfect vows.

“Viewing *saṃsāra* to be like a pit of fire; primarily sticking to one’s own needs; [and] striving for the goal of liberation is known as the lesser vehicle.

“Viewing all beings as one’s loving parents; primarily sticking to the needs of others; [and] striving for the goal of omniscience is said to be the great vehicle.

“Viewing *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* to be equal; realizing one’s own and others’ needs equally; [and] realizing spontaneous accomplishment is the unsurpassed vehicle.

“One’s own needs, others needs, or both needs—whichever is supreme; with a small mental intention, a middling mental intention, or a great and powerful mental intention; afraid of *saṃsāra*, not afraid, or [completely] devoid of fear; [each] practice is set forth as the three perfect vehicles.

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 278: *blo 'di*

“The three objects of refuge are subsumed in the lord guru. The three vows are subsumed in abandoning mental conceptualization. The three vehicles are subsumed in subduing one’s own mind. All of them are subsumed in realizing the nature of phenomena.

“The supreme true guru is the essence of the three supreme jewels. Pacifying the mental conceptualization of one’s own mind contains the three vows. If one subdues this mind by means of the *dharmā*, that is the essential point of the three vehicles, there is no other. If one realizes the nature of phenomena of one’s own mind, one pacifies mental conceptualization, subdues the mental continuum, and mixes one’s mind with [the guru’s] mind.

“[That which] makes no differentiation in the expanse of the *dharmakāya*; enters into the *sambhogakāya*—the union of generation stage and completion stage; thinks of beings with the compassion of the *nirmāṇakāya*: the mind of the guru is *buddha*.

“[That which] has principally subdued one’s afflictive emotions, has gathered in brief only the most essential point of all of the *dharmā*, and manifestly teaches the way of being of the nature of phenomena: the speech of the guru is [three] baskets of *dharmā*.<sup>486</sup>

“[That which] pacifies and subdues according to the method of *śravakas*, acts for the benefit of others in the method of *bodhisattvas*, and is like a village of heroes and heroines: the body [of the guru], because of that, is the assembly (*saṅgha*) of the three vehicles.

“[His] mind is *buddha*; speech is true *dharmā*; body is *saṅgha*. Thereby the singular guru subsumes all of the supreme jewels. Knowing that, always depend on him [by imagining him] on the crown of your head, never separated [from you]. [He] brings all the blessings of the three objects of refuge to you, like medicine.

“Belief in incorrect views—a pure, blissful and permanent self—this is the root of all faults. Abandoning this [pattern of] mental conceptualization is the liberation of the individual.

“The view that cherishes oneself but does not do so for others, this is the consideration of only oneself. Abandoning this [pattern of] mental conceptualization is *bodhicitta*.

“Being attached to ordinary appearances and being attached to sublime deities, this is the belief in [fixed] characteristics [of things]. Abandoning this [pattern of] mental conceptualization is the *mantra* vow.

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<sup>486</sup> As explained in chapter 3, this stanza uses punning to include the name of each of the three baskets ('*dul ba*; *mdo sde*; *mngon chos*) in its statements about how the guru teaches. Ibid., 280: *nyon mongs 'dul ba gtsor byas nas/ chos kun gnad don mdo ru bsdus/ chos nyid gnas lugs mngon du ston/ bla ma'i gsung ni sde snod chos/*

“Not believing in what is incorrect, not considering [only] one’s own needs, not believing in the mental conceptualization of things’ characteristics—in this state free of the mental conceptualization of considering anything at all: this is the way to purify and enter into all three vows assembled together. Just like rivers [running into] in the great ocean, there is no differentiation in and of itself [between the three vows].

“Not desiring to remain in the three realms, removing craving and grasping, and primarily subduing the mind of desire, this is the Lesser Vehicle.

“Fondness for beings through compassion is the mental attitude of great love; primarily subduing the mind of anger, this is known as the Great Vehicle.

“Unifying wisdom and skillful means and the generation stage and completion stage practices, and primarily subduing delusionary mental conceptualization by means of the meditative concentration of great equanimity, this is the Unsurpassed Vehicle itself.

“If one knows that there is no self, who is there to be attached to? If self and other are equal, who is there to hate? When there is no self and other, the phenomena [that appear] to mind and the expanse beyond the mind are nondual.

“When it is like this, that is called ‘subduing the mind,’ and all phenomena will come under one’s control. Because of that, subduing the mind is no different than the three vehicles gathered together.

“If one properly realizes the nature of mind, one knows the three objects of refuge as one’s own mind. One’s mind has mixed with the mind of the supreme guru. Therefore, they [the three jewels as encapsulated by the guru] are said to be condensed into that [realizing the nature of your own mind].

“If one properly realizes the nature of mind, mental conceptualization subsides as it arises. Mental conceptualization continually [arises as] wisdom. Therefore, they [the three vows as encapsulated by the pacification of mental conceptualization] are said to be condensed into that [realizing the nature of mind].

“If one properly realizes the nature of mind, both appearances and mind will come under one’s control. In the expanse of reality as such, the mind [that which takes phenomena as its object] is subdued. Therefore they [the three vehicles as encapsulated by subduing the mind] are said to be condensed into that [realizing the nature of mind].

“In the expanse of reality as such, the guru’s mind and one’s own mind are not different. Resting in that [expanse], all mental conceptualization is pacified. The three poisons, [themselves] mistaken, are properly subdued. In the state of realizing both what is to be abandoned and the remedy [to what is to be abandoned] as of one taste, one compassionately generates surpassing love for beings. With respect to the

realization of the nature of phenomena, all phenomena are subsumed, just like the world and its inhabitants are subsumed in the expanse of empty space.

“To the extent that all Buddhas are not different in the expanse of the *dharmakāya*, so too are all gurus not different in the expanse of the ground of emanation.<sup>487</sup> All gurus are Buddhas. The enlightened mind (*dgongs*) is inseparable from the *dharmakāya*. All Buddhas are gurus. Whatever is to be subdued appears as someone to be trained.

“By the power of how things are (*chos kyi dbang*), the single moon, appears in different ways as greater or smaller, over and over. By the power of those to be trained, the single guru arrives in manifold guises, over and over.

“By the power of water bowls, the single moon appears in the form of multiple moons [reflected in the water bowls] at one moment. By the power of the mind of beings, the single guru appears as many at the same time.

“By the power of clouds the single moon’s light rays appear variously as bright or dim. By the power of mental conceptualization, the single guru appears variously as good or bad, with faults or good qualities.

“By the power of one’s karma, the single moon appears to each person as bringing cold weather or causing a drought. By the power of one’s wishes, the single guru appears as the ground for faith or for false views.

“By the power of day and night, the single moon appears to rise or set. By the power of the needs of beings, the single guru appears to go or stay.

“The body of all gurus is one. One’s root guru is manifestly enlightened. He points out your own mind to be *dharmakāya*. His kindness is superior to that of all Buddhas.

“The body of all gurus of the three lineages are also of the same essence. All of the different gurus are undifferentiable. Their actions are not different and are free from going and staying. Whatever they do is kindness. Realizing this is the root [teaching].

“One who acts according to others’ needs is a guru. One who accomplishes his own needs is not a guru. One who teaches the three vehicles is a guru. One who teaches what is not *dharma* is not a guru. One who subdues the minds of his students is a guru. If he does not subdue their minds, he is not a guru. If he applies himself to virtue, he is a guru. If he does not apply himself to virtue, he is not a guru. One who benefits whomever he encounters is a guru. One who does not benefit is not a guru. One who possesses a compassionate mind is a guru. One who is without compassion is not a guru.

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 282: *sprul gzhi'i klong*.

“Those that are called a guru, while they may have different characteristics and manifestations, their *dharmakāya* is equal and their enlightened activity is equal and their aspiration is equal and their benefit to beings is equal.

“He who teaches the *dharma* to accomplish the needs of others, who subdues the mental continuum of students, who introduces whomever he meets to the path of true virtue at whose root is the mind of compassion, is a guru. All who are that way are equal.

“Depending on a guru and serving a guru, these are the condensations of the 80,000 entryways to the *dharma*. This final, single essential point is devotion—the singular sufficient pure [remedy].

“It unlocks the door to all of the *dharma*, it clears away the obstacles to all practice, it brings out the benefits of all oral instructions, it is devotion (and should be known as such).

“It is [the way to] offer an entreaty to the mind completely filled with compassion, it becomes a vessel for all blessings, it gathers together the quintessence of all of the yogic accomplishments, it is devotion—the singular sufficient pure [remedy].

“It cannot be conquered by all of the demons, all obstacles are unable [to stop it], all stains are washed away [by it], it is devotion (and should be known as such).

“It acts such that false desires are not born, at the time of death there is no cutting off of what is essential [for life], it pacifies the false appearances of the *bardo*, it is devotion (and should be known as such).

“In this life, the holy ones adhere to it. At the moment of death, it arises in the appearance of one’s guru. In the next [life] [it causes you to] go to a pure realm. It is devotion (and should be known as such).

“It is inseparable from all [three] objects of refuge gathered together. It quickly brings whatever one desires. Finally, it accomplishes both one’s own and others’ needs. It is devotion (and should be known as such).

“It raises mental conceptualizations to [the status of] virtuous mental states. It arises in the context of realizing the stages and paths [to liberation]. Finally, it [causes] one’s mind and the [guru’s] mind to mix. It is devotion (and should be known as such).

“This itself is guru devotion. If one has accomplished it through unchangingly relying on the guru, whether one has offered reverence or has not, whether one has made supplication prayers or not, it [devotion] clears away the obstacles to entering into all of the blessings that are gathered together in the essential oral instructions. It clears away all of the false appearances of birth, death, and the *bardo*. Because of this, it [brings] bliss. It accomplishes whatever one desires, and, finally, leads to

accomplishing Buddhahood. It is devotion. It is the single essential point of thousands of oral instructions.

“The method of depending on the guru is devotion. It is not offering reverence. The method of practicing for the guru is devotion. It is not offering supplication prayers. If there is devotion, anything that one has done enters into blessing. If there is no devotion, anything that one has done will be without benefit.

“The three vows and the three vehicles, while different in name, have a single meaning. Abandoning mental conceptualization and subduing one’s mental continuum are different in name but have a single meaning. Therefore, all are condensed into one. By means of the guru’s advice, subdue one’s own mental continuum. These are one hundred waters below a single bridge. Six are condensed into one, and nine are also condensed [into one].

“The ‘mental continuum’ is mental conceptualization. A mental continuum that does not consist of mental conceptualization is not found. Subduing mental conceptualization is the doorway to the *dharma*. 80,000 and 4,000 [teachings] are condensed [into this one: subduing mental conceptualization].

“In this way, whatever appears in *saṃsāra* is merely imputed by mental conceptualization. In this way, even *nirvāṇa* is merely imputed by mental conceptualization. Thus virtue and wrongdoing are mental conceptualizations. The path and what is not the path are mental conceptualizations. Self and selflessness are merely mental conceptualizations. All of the doxographic views are mental conceptualizations. Therefore this [method] of subduing mental conceptualization is the essential point of all the earlier and later [teachings].<sup>488</sup> What was taught earlier is again taught; because of [its] great meaning, it is repeated and explained.

“If you ask how to subdue mental conceptualization: first, differentiate and subdue mental conceptualization; in the middle, look at and subdue mental conceptualization; in the end, establish and subdue mental conceptualization.

“First, divide mental conceptualization into white and black. Increase white and eliminate black. Faith and *bodhicitta* and wisdom (*shes rab*) are white. Desire and anger and delusion are black. The three white ones are on the side of liberation. As one [they are] virtue—temporary or profound virtue. The three black ones are on the side of wrongdoing. As one [they are] misdoing—temporary or profound misdoing.

“Faith gathers together all of the roots of virtue. *Bodhicitta* is the ground of the entire Great Bodhisattva Vehicle. Wisdom is the root of the entire path to liberation. Therefore, the three are to be generated.

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<sup>488</sup> This is most likely a reference to the earlier transmission of the *dharma* to Tibet (*snga dar*) and the later transmission (*phyi dar*).

“Because of desire, one grasps at all of what appears in the world. Anger generates all suffering. Delusion is the ground and the fruit of desire and anger. Therefore, these three are to be abandoned.

“Confidence in the true *dharma* is faith. Wishing for others’ needs [to be accomplished] and [for them to be] enlightened is *bodhicitta*. Realizing all phenomena to be without reality is the supreme wisdom. These three purify the three poisons and clear away the two obscurations.

“In the middle, look at and subdue mental conceptualization. Grasp [mental conceptualization] freely, without casting it away, by means of mindfulness. Later, when it transforms, do not let it escape, sustaining it with attentiveness. During the time of recognizing it [as mental conceptualization], look at its nature. By merely having looked at it, [you will recognize it as] empty. It is not necessary to enter into analysis of it. Free of movement and without substance it is empty of essence. The nature of its emptiness is self-radiant clarity.

“If one knows this empty nature of mind, one knows the empty nature of all phenomena. Analyzing various objects is not necessary. If one cuts the root, the branches dry up. Because this mind is the ground of all phenomena, the emptiness of mind is [the emptiness] of all phenomena. [The mental state] immediately after having seen this is itself empty. There is no leisure time for lots of analysis of it.

“In the end, meet the face of mind. It is ineffable, unimaginable. It is not a perceived object, it is without a fixed point of reference (*rtod phur med*). It should be called “luminous clarity.” If one realizes the meaning of it being free from ‘being this,’ the experience of being without reference point emerges. Who is it who knows realization or non-realization? Search for where what is to be realized and that which realizes are. At that time, it is not necessary to abandon mental conceptualization. Cunning is not necessary; control is not necessary. One does not forge a path; liberation is not necessary. Establishing [mental activity] in its own state, it is liberated on its own.

“At the time of appearing it is empty. At the time of being empty it appears. Appearance and emptiness undifferentiated is self-radiant clarity. The compassionate [energy] of clarity is unobstructed. The nature of wisdom—the self-liberation of subject and object—and stainless mind is radiant clarity. The nature of phenomena—nondual subject and object—is *bodhicitta*.

“Seeing this innate-great bliss-truth is the fruit of the path of devotion to the guru. The root of all methods for subduing mind is just mindfulness: first, deliberate attention; in the middle, [mindfulness of] the expanse; in the end, a state without mindfulness [which is] radiant clarity.

“Through mindfulness one abandons all wrongdoing. Through mindfulness one gathers together all virtue. Through mindfulness one subdues one’s own mind. Mindfulness is the root of all *dharma*.

“When one is in the middle of many [people], rely on mindfulness. When one is alone, rely on mindfulness. When one has a single non-distracted moment, rely on mindfulness.

“Devotion is the nose-rope entrusted in the hand of the guru. The stake of mindfulness [preventing] wavering has been planted into the ground. By means of various methods, subdue one’s own mind. This supreme person rides the great vehicle.

“[A work that] makes divisions is a scripture (*gzhung*). One that condenses things into their essential point is a pith instruction (*man ngag*). Bringing together scripture and pith instruction—know that such speech is the kindness of the guru.”

Whatever virtue comes from speaking this [teaching] has mixed with the mind of the one who requested the teaching, may it be so constantly until the state of perfect omniscience!

Thus composed the great scholar of Kham, Śubhaṃśrī, in Mañjughoṣa’s Skeleton with Clenched Fangs Cave (*‘jam dpa’i dbyangs keng rus mche ba gtsig pa’i pho brang*).



## Appendix II: *Nitiśāstra* & *Lekha* in the Tibetan Tanjur

### *Nitiśāstra* (8)<sup>489</sup>

All in the *Thun mong ba lugs kyi bstan bcos* section of the Derge edition of the Tanjur (vol. ngo):<sup>490</sup>

Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub), “A Treatise Called One Hundred Verses of Wisdom.”  
*Prajñāsātakanāmaprakaraṇa*. Tibetan: *Shes rab brgya pa zhes bya ba'i rab tu byed pa*.  
Translated into Tibetan by Sarvajñādeva, Dpal brtsegs.  
Tohoku 4328.

Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub), “The Staff of Wisdom: A Treatise on Conduct.”<sup>491</sup>  
*Nītiśāstraprajñādaṇḍa*. Tibetan: *Lugs kyi bstan bcos shes rab sdong bu*.  
Trans. Śīlendrabodhi, Ye shes sde.  
Tohoku 4329.

Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub), “A Drop which Nourishes Beings: A Treatise on Conduct.”  
*Nītiśāstrajanapoṣaṇabindu*. Tibetan: *Lugs kyi bstan bcos skye ba gso ba'i thigs pa*.  
Trans. Śīlendrabodhi, Ye shes sde.  
Tohoku 4330.

Ravigupta (Ni ma spas pa), “Noble Treasury: A Treatise on Conduct.”<sup>492</sup>  
*Āryakoṣanītiśāstra*. Tibetan: *Lugs kyi bstan bcos tshigs su bcad pa'i mdzod*.  
Trans. Jñānaśānti, Dpal gyi lhun po.  
Tohoku 4331.

Vararuci (Mchog sred), “The Hundred Verses.”  
*Śatagāthā*. Tibetan: *Tshigs su bcad pa brgya pa*.  
Trans. Vinayacandra, Chos kyi shes rab.  
Tohoku 4332.

Amoghavarṣa (Don yod 'char), “The Garland of Jewels: Flawless Answers to Questions.”<sup>493</sup>  
*Vimalaprasānottararatnamālā*. Tibetan: *Dri ma med pa'i dris lan rin po che'i phreng ba*.  
Trans. Kamalagupta, Rin chen bzang po  
Tohoku 4333.

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<sup>489</sup> See Pathak, *Indian Nītiśāstras*, 25-45. Per Patak, 25, there are eight *nītiśāstra* in both the *Sde dge bstan 'gyur* and the index to the *Snar thang bstan 'gyur*. Cf. Hahn, “Die Indischen Nītiśāstras.”

<sup>490</sup> Tshul khriṃs rin chen, ed., *Sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 203.

<sup>491</sup> In its Tibetan form, this work is in 260 verses. Pathak concludes that it is an incomplete collection. Pathak, *Indian Nītiśāstras*, 37.

<sup>492</sup> In 125 verses. *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>493</sup> Amoghavarṣa seems to have been a Jain. Multiple Sanskrit versions of the text, as well as a Prakrit recension, are extant. The Tibetan version amounts to twenty-five verses. *Ibid.*, 25.

Caṇaka or Cāṇakya (Tsa na ka), “Caṇaka’s Treatise on Conduct for a King.”<sup>494</sup>  
*Cāṇakyaśāstra*. Tibetan: *Tsa na ka’i rgyal po’i lugs kyi bstan bcos*.  
Trans. Prabhākaraśrīmitra, Rin chen bzang po.  
Tohoku 4334.

Masūrākṣa (Ma su ra kṣa), “A Treatise on Conduct.”<sup>495</sup>  
*Nītiśāstra*. Tibetan: *Lugs kyi bstan bcos*.  
Trans. Dharmasrībhadrā, Shākya blo gros  
Tohoku 4335.

### **Lekha (13)**<sup>496</sup>

In the *Spring yig* section of the Derge edition of the Tanjur (vol. *nge*)<sup>497</sup>:

Avalokiteśvara, “Letter Sent to the Monk Prakāśakumāra by Avalokiteśvara”  
*Āryāvalokiteśvarapreṣitabhikṣuprakāśakumāralekha*. Tibetan: *’phags pa spyān ras  
gzigs dbang phyug gis dge slong rab gsal gzhon nu la springs pa’i phrin yig*.  
Trans. Sarvajñādeva, Dpal brtsegs.  
Tohoku 4181.

Nāgārjuna, “Letter to a Friend.”  
*Suḥrīlekha*. Tibetan: *Bshes pa’i spring yig*.  
Trans. Sarvajñādeva, Dpal brtsegs.  
Tohoku 4182.

Candragomin, “Letter to a Disciple.”  
*Śiṣyalekha*. Tibetan: *Slob ma la springs pa’i spring yig*.  
Trans. Sarvajñādeva, Dpal brtsegs.  
Tohoku 4183.

Maṭṛceta, “Letter to King Kaniṣka.”  
*Mahārājakanīṣkalekha*. Tibetan: *Rgyal po chen po ka ni ka la springs pa’i spring yig*.  
Trans. Vidyākaraśrībhadrā, Rin chen mchog. Revised by Dpal brtsegs.  
Tohoku 4184.

Jitārī, “Letter Called The Graded Course of the Purification of the ‘Mind-Jewel.’”  
*Cittaratnaviśodhanakramanāmalekha*. Tibetan: *Sems rin po che rnam par sbyang ba’i  
rim pa zhes bya ba’i spring yig*.  
Trans. Du lo pa and Chos kyi shes rab.  
Tohoku 4185.

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<sup>494</sup> Caṇaka may have been a Brahman. A Sankrit text, which diverges from the Tibetan translation, is extant. The work in its Tibetan form consists of 250 stanzas in eight chapters. Ibid., 33.

<sup>495</sup> This work consists of 128 verses in seven chapters, which Pathak concludes is a compilation. Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>496</sup> For discussions, see Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 196-212; Dietz, *Die buddhistische Briefliteratur*.

<sup>497</sup> Tshul khrims rin chen, ed., *Sde dge bstan ’gyur*, vol. 173.

Monk \*Āraṇyaka (*Dgon pa ba*), “Letter to a Spiritual Teacher.”  
*Gurulekha*. Tibetan: *Bla ma la springs pa*.  
Trans. Vinayacandra, Chos kyi shes rab  
Tohoku 4186.

Sajjana, “Letter to the Son.”  
*Putralekha*. Tibetan: *Bu la springs pa*.  
Trans. Mahājana, Mar pa chos kyi dbang phyug  
Tohoku 4187.

Atiśa, “Letter Consisting of Flawless Jewels.”<sup>498</sup>  
*Vimalaratnalekha*. Tibetan: *Dri ma med pa'i rin po che'i phrin yig*.  
Trans. Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna [Atiśa], Tshul khriims rgyal ba.  
Tohoku 4188.

Mitrayogin, “Letter to King Candra.”  
*Candrarājalekha*. Tibetan: *Rgyal po zla ba la springs pa'i spring yig*.  
Trans. Jaganmitrānanda (Mitrayogin), Gnubs tshul khriims shes rab.  
Tohoku 4189.

Kamalaśīla, “Explanation of the Kinds of Suffering to Lho Zamo Tsangyang.”  
*Lho za mo tshangs dbyangs la sdug bsngal gyi bye brag bstan pa*.  
Composed in Tibetan.<sup>499</sup>  
Tohoku 4193.

Buddhaguhya (Sangs rgyas gsang ba), “Letter to the Ruler, Nobility, and Subjects of Tibet.”  
*Bod rje 'bangs dang btsun pa rnams la spring yig*.  
Composed in Tibetan.<sup>500</sup>  
Tohoku 4194.

In the *Bstan bcos sna tshogs* section of the Derge edition of the Tanjur (vol. co):<sup>501</sup>

Dpal dbyangs, “Letter that Summarizes the Essence.”  
*Gces pa bsdu pa'i phrin yig bod rje 'bangs la brdzangs pa*.  
Composed in Tibetan.<sup>502</sup>  
Tohoku 4355.

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<sup>498</sup> Composed in 1040 CE.

<sup>499</sup> Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 199.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>501</sup> Tshul khriims rin chen, ed. *Sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 204.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

In the *Rgyud* section of the Derge edition of the Tanjur (vol. zi):<sup>503</sup>

Padmavajra (Padma rdo rje), “Letter of Wisdom.”<sup>504</sup>

*Prajñālekha*. Tibetan: *Shes rab kyi 'phrin yig*.

Trans. Shāntabhadra, 'Gos lhas btsas

Tohoku 2455.

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<sup>503</sup> Tshul khrims rin chen, ed. *Sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 53.

<sup>504</sup> Hahn argues that this work is unlike the other *nītiśāstra* in character. Hahn, *Invitation to Enlightenment*, 210, n. 1.

### Appendix III: Mipham's Overview of Patrul's Collected Works<sup>505</sup>

In his *Bzhugs byang*, Mipham organizes Patrul's diverse compositions into the following categories:

- Poetics
- Hymns
- Advice Compositions
- Metrics
- Astrological Calculations
- Analytical Outlines of Treatises
- First Turning Teachings
- Confession
- Ascetic Practice (connected to the Mantra Vehicle)
- Commentaries on Treatises of the Second Turning
- Commentaries on the Mantra Vehicle and Mantra Practice Instructions
- Tantric Empowerments
- Generation Stage Practice
- Completion Stage Practice
- Mahāmudrā* and Dzogchen
- Miscellaneous Recitations
- Life Advice

Mipham organizes these works in an analytical outline, as follows:

1. Secular Sciences (*thun mong rig gnas*)
    - 1.1 Poetic Compositions (*snyan dngags*)
      - 1.1.1. Hymns (*bstod tshogs*)
      - 1.1.2. Advice Compositions (*gtam tshogs*)
    - 1.2 Metrics (*sdeb sbyor*)
    - 1.3 Astrological Calculations (*skar rtsis*)
  2. "Inner Knowledge": Buddhist Topics (*thun mong ma yin pa nang don rig pa*)
    - 2.1 Analytical Outlines (*bsdus don sa bcad sna tshogs*)
    - 2.2 Scriptures to be Explained (*bshad bya'i gzhung*)
      - 2.2.1 The Philosophical Vehicle (*rgyu mtshan nyid kyi theg pa*)
- The Three Turnings of the Wheel (*'khor lo gsum so so ba*):

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<sup>505</sup> Mipham, *Bzhugs byang*. Zagtsa Paldor has prepared an index that reconciles the titles listed in Mipham's outline with the compositions that appear in the 2009 edition of Patrul's collected works. See Rdza dpal sprul, *Gsung 'bum* 2009, vol. 8.

2.2.1.1.1 The First Turning (*'khor lo dang por gtogs pa*):

2.2.1.1.1.1 First Turning Teachings

2.2.1.1.1.2 *Mahāyāna* Confession Texts (*theg chen gso sbyong*)

2.2.1.1.1.3 Ascetic Practice from *Mantrayāna Tantras*  
(*gsang sngags bya ba'i rgyud kyi bka' thub*)

2.2.1.1.2 The Second Turning:

(Commentaries on) Treatises that Comment on the Intention of  
the Intermediary Turning (*'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs 'grel gyi bstan bcos*)

2.2.1.1.3 The Third Turning:

The Mantra Vehicle (which is the root of the final turning) together  
with Practice Instructions (*'khor lo tha ma gtso bor gyur pa'i theg gsum sngags dang  
bcas pa'i nyams len*)

2.2.2 Commentaries on the Intention of the Various Aspects of the Result Vehicle of  
Mantra (*'bras bu sngags kyi theg pa'i phyogs kyi dgongs 'grel pa*)

2.2.2.1 Clarifying the Empowerments that are the Door to Entry  
(*'jugs sgo dbang gi gsal byed*)

2.2.2.2 Stages of the Method for Training in Mantra  
(*sngags la slob tshul gyi rim pa*)

2.2.2.2.1 The Path of the Vase Initiation Together with the Branches of  
Generation Stage Practice  
(*bum dbang gi lam bskyed rim yan lag dang bcas pa*)

2.2.2.2.2 The Path of the Secret Knowledge Initiation and Instructions on the  
Perfection Stage (*gsang sher dbang gi lam rdzogs rim du gtogs pa*)

2.2.2.2.3 The Path of the Fourth Initiation; Practice of *Mahāmudrā* and Dzogchen  
(*dbang bzhi pa'i lam phyag rdzogs kyi nyams len ston pa*)

2.2.2.2.4 Miscellaneous Supplementary Recitations  
(*de dag gi cha lag ngag 'don thor ba*)

2.2.2.2.5 Life Advice (*zhal gdams sna tshogs*)

## Appendix IV: The Path in *The Discourse Good in the Beginning, Middle, & End*

### *Preliminary Practices*

- (1) Taking Refuge (v. 24: *dkon mchog gsum*)
- (2) Arousing bodhicitta (v. 25: *byang chub sems*)
- (3) Confession of Wrongdoing (v. 26: *sdig ltung mthol zhing bshags*)
- (4) Making (maṇḍala) Offerings (v. 27: *yar mchod mar sbyin 'khor 'das kun la bsngo*)
- (5) Guru Yoga (v. 28: *bla ma la dad pa'i gdung shugs skyed*)

### *General Vajrayāna Practices*

- (6) Receiving Empowerments (v. 29: *dbang bzhi*)
- (7) Pure Perception (v. 30: *dag snang*)

### *Development Stage Practices*

- (8) Visualization of the Deity's Body (v. 31: *bde gshegs bsgom*)
- (9) Reciting mantra (v. 32: *sngags*)
- (10) The Four Activities (Pacifying, Increasing, Controlling, Subjugating)  
(v. 33: *zhi rgyas dbang thul las bzhi*)
- (11) Offering Torma, Molding Tsa-Tsa, & Making Prostrations  
(v. 34: *gtor ma bsngos, sā ts-tshā 'debs, lha phyag 'tshal*)

### *Transfiguration of Worldly Practices into Dharmic Practice*

- (12) Love, Compassion, Devotion (v. 35: *byams pa, snying rje, dad pa*);  
Alternatives to overcoming enemies, protecting your family, and  
harvesting your land.
- (13) Nonattachment, Practicing the Essence of Dharma, Dedicating Merit  
(v. 36: *zhen med, snying po'i chos kyis ded, tshogs bsags bsngos*);  
Alternatives to practices for the dead.
- (14) Devotion, Renunciation, Compassion  
(v. 37 *ded pa, 'dir snang zhen log, snying rje*);  
Alternatives to one's duties to one's children.

### *Recognizing the Empty Nature of the Mind*

- (15) Liberating Conceptualization as it Arises (v. 38: *rnam rtog shar grol*)
- (16) Non-Activity (v. 39: *byar med*)

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- (17) One-pointedness (v. 40: *rtse gcig nyams*)
- (18) Simplicity (v. 41: *gnyug ma'i gshis*)
- (19) One Taste (v. 42: *ro gcig*)
- (20) Nonmeditation (v. 43: *bsgom med*)

*Transfiguration of Worldly Experiences into Dharmic Practice*

*The Senses:*

- (21) Recognizing Visual Form as the Deity: Essential Point of Development Stage  
(v. 44: *gzugs snang lha ru shes*)
- (22) Recognizing Sound as *mantra*: Essential Point of Recitation  
(v. 45: *sgra snang sngags su shes*)
- (23) Recognizing Smells as Unborn: Essential Point of Completion Stage  
(v. 46: *dri snang skye med shes*)
- (24) Recognizing Taste as the Ritual Feast: Essential Point of Offering  
(v. 47: *ro snang tshogs su shes*)
- (25) Recognizing Touch as Equality: Essential Point of Equal Taste  
(v. 48: *reg snang mnyam nyid shes*)
- (26) Recognizing all (Mental) Phenomena as Empty: Essential Point of the View  
(v. 49: *chos kun stong par shes*)

*Harmful Emotions:*

- (27) Self-Liberation of Anger: Mirrorlike Wisdom  
(v. 50: *zhe sdang rang grol; me long ye shes*)
- (28) Self-Liberation of Pride: Wisdom of Equality  
(v. 51: *nga rgyal rang grol; mnyam nyid ye shes*)
- (29) Self-Liberation of Desire: All-Discriminating Wisdom  
(v. 52: *'dod chags rang grol; sor rtog ye shes*)
- (30) Self-Liberation of Jealousy: All-Accomplishing Wisdom  
(v. 53: *phrag dog rang grol; bya grub ye shes*)
- (31) Self-Liberation of Delusion: Wisdom of *Dharmadhātu*  
(v. 54: *gti mug rang grol; chos dbyings ye shes*)

*Aggregates:*

- (32) Understanding Form (Matter) as Empty: Chenrezi—Sublime King of the Sky  
(v. 55: *gzugs phung ye stong: spyen ras gzigs—'phag pha nam mkha'i rgyal po*)
- (33) Understanding Feeling as Equal Taste: Chenrezi—Sublime Bountiful Lasso  
(v. 56: *tshor ba ro myam: spyen ras gzigs—'phag pa don yod zhags pa*)

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<sup>506</sup> While the four yogas are usually associated with the Kagyud *Mahāmudrā* practice lineage, they also appear within the Nyingma *Dzogchen* lineage, as Jigme Lingpa explains in his *White Lotus: Supporting Instructions Following on from the Graduated Path of Ripening and Liberating in the Vajrayāna* (*Klong chen snying gi thig le las rdo rje theg pa'i smin grol lam gyi rim pa las 'phro ba'i man ngag gi rgyab brten padma dkar po*). Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection*, 186–187.



(34) Understanding Discrimination as Compassion: Chenrezi—Sublime One Who Dredges the Depths of *Saṃsāra*

(v. 57: *'du shes snying rjes: phyan ras gzigs—'phags mchog 'khor ba dong sprugs*)

(35) Understanding Mental Formations as One Taste: Chenrezi—Greatly Compassionate Subduer of Beings

(v. 58: *'du byed ro gcig spyen ras gzigs—'gro 'dul thugs rje can*)

(36) Understanding Consciousness as Buddha: Chenrezi—Sublime Ocean of Conquerors

(v. 59: *rnam shes sangs rgyas: spyen ras gzigs—'phags mchog rgyal ba rgya mtsho*)

*Body, Speech, Mind & Dharmakāya:*

(37) Recognizing Body as the Deity Chenrezi—Sublime Khasarpaṇi

(v. 60: *lus snang lha ru shes—'phags mchog kha sarpa ṇi*)

(38) Recognizing Speech as the Mantra of Chenrezi—Sublime Lion's Roar

(v. 61: *ngag snang sngags su shes—'phags mchog senge sgra*)

(39) Recognizing Mental Perception in its Natural State as Chenrezi—Sublime Relaxation in Mind Itself

(v. 62: *sems snang gshis la bzhaḡ—'phags mchog sems nyid ngal bso*)

(40) Recognizing Everything as *Dharmakāya* is Chenrezi—Sublime Sovereign of the Universe

(v. 63: *snang srid chos sku'i rang zhal mjal—'phags mchog 'jig rten dbang phyug*)

#### *Summary*

(41) Chenrezi embodies all Buddhas

(v. 64: *lha gcig rgyal ba kun 'dus spyen ras gzigs*)

(42) Chenrezi's *mantra* embodies all *mantra*

(v. 64: *sngags gcig snying po kun 'dus yi ge drug*)

(43) *Bodhicitta* embodies all tantric visualization practices

(v. 64: *chos gcig bskyed rdzogs kun 'dus byang chub sems*)

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